



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Tuesday 18 March 2025**

**Session 6**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 18 March 2025*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Carol Telfer, chaplain of Glasgow hospice, Marie Curie.

**Carol Telfer (Chaplain of Glasgow Hospice, Marie Curie):** Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

Marie Curie aims to be a beacon of support for those at the end of their lives, ensuring that they and their families receive the compassion, respect and care that they deserve. The Marie Curie great daffodil appeal takes place every March, marking a significant fundraising campaign to support the vital work of Marie Curie. It has grown to become one of the United Kingdom's most widely recognised charity campaigns, deeply rooted in community participation. The daffodil pin is not just our symbol; it is recognised as a lifeline for many families and worn as an act of solidarity.

From our in-patient units to our community outreach, staff prepare to cope with any eventuality. Day and night, teams care for patients and their families by giving willingly of themselves where the need for support is greatest. Marie Curie services ensure that our patients receive the nursing and medical treatment they need in a caring, dignified environment, whether in the hospice or at home.

From personalised medical and physical support to psychological, spiritual and emotional care, whatever the illness, at whatever stage of the journey, our aim is to help our patients live the best possible life, right to the end. However, we do not step away at that point but continue to support families in the months ahead through our bereavement service.

A verse in the Bible reminds us to love our neighbours as ourselves, and although we are not a faith-based organisation, this principle of aiming to treat everyone with compassion is key in all that we do. John came to us to have the symptoms of his illness managed. He was experiencing physical and emotional distress. Whilst the medical team worked on his physical symptoms, other professionals worked on his emotional ones.

It transpired that John felt that he had missed the opportunity to marry the love of his life. He

wanted to give her security, which would be better provided for her if they were married. Working together as a team, a week later, John was standing in the Marie Curie hospice quiet room, waiting for his bride to arrive. I was privileged to conduct their wedding ceremony in front of patients and staff, who John described as his extended family.

That is just one of many stories that I could share with you. As people engage with the services offered by Marie Curie, that can prove to be a life-changing experience in so many different ways, both today and into the future.

Thank you for your time.

## Point of Order

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On 12 March, when my party was holding party business on equalities, and I was sponsoring a round-table event entitled “The Power of Women’s Voices”, guests of the Scottish Parliament felt that they were treated with unjustified levels of suspicion. Upon entering the Parliament, one woman had her scarf, which was in the suffragette colours, confiscated. Another woman had her trouser waistband searched, and another had her bag turned out and was told that she could wear only one of her lapel badges. Another woman was told to remove her—

**The Presiding Officer:** Sorry, Ms Gosal, but I will just stop you there. Just for clarity, a point of order relates to whether proper procedures are being or have been followed in our proceedings—it is regarding an item of business. I would be interested if the member could explain which rule she is referring to.

**Pam Gosal:** I have not got the rule. I am basically asking about how those women were treated. I have three questions to ask you, Presiding Officer.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Gosal. That is not a point of order, and it is not appropriate for the chair of parliamentary business to comment on any matters that are outwith the Parliament’s standing orders at this point. However, we can certainly discuss the issue outwith the chamber.

**Pam Gosal:** I have written to you, Presiding Officer.

**The Presiding Officer:** I have not received your correspondence yet, Ms Gosal, but I look forward to receiving it.

## Topical Question Time

14:05

### Small Vessel Replacement Programme

**1. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the reported decision to award phase 1 of the small vessel replacement programme to a Polish shipyard. (S6T-02425)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** Although there will be disappointment that Ferguson Marine was not identified as lead bidder, for our islands, this is an important milestone in the procurement to build and deliver seven new small vessels for our ferry network. The new vessels will help to improve connectivity and resilience for island residents, businesses and communities, and their electric operation will contribute to a reduction in carbon emissions from Scotland’s ferry fleet and make ferry travel more sustainable.

In advance of further questions, I point out that this is still a live procurement process, and we are limited in what we can say during the 10-day standstill period. The process is being led by Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd as the procuring authority.

**Stuart McMillan:** The Deputy First Minister will be aware of the frustration of many people in my community, including the local workforce of Ferguson Marine and me, who want answers to vital questions, such as where Ferguson Marine ranked among the five candidate locations, how its bid compared to other yards in quality and price and what the Scottish Government is now doing to ensure that it has a future.

Will the Deputy First Minister answer those three questions now, and if she is not able to do so because of the 10-day standstill period, will she commit to publishing that information when that period concludes?

**Kate Forbes:** I know that Stuart McMillan understands that this is a live procurement, so there are limitations on what I can say or the level of information that I can share at this point in the process. Scottish ministers did not play any part in the review of the bids. CMAL is the procuring authority and has started the 10-day standstill period before the contract can be signed.

However, we understand from its feedback that Ferguson Marine scored highly on quality. As noted in the news release, CMAL used a technical quality weighting of 65 per cent for this contract, with 35 per cent for price.

David Dishon, the chief financial officer, said:

“We are very proud of our bid and although we priced it competitively, we were up against extremely tough competition ... we were pleased to see Ferguson Marine’s bid rated so highly on quality ... Reaching the final round of bidding demonstrates the strength of our proposal and gives us renewed confidence in our ability to produce Clyde-built ships that are world class.”

I understand that the member has also received some direct assurances from CMAL on the process that was carried out.

**Stuart McMillan:** I have never doubted the shop floor workforce’s abilities. That they have built vessels, including the three previous small vessels, with some antiquated equipment highlights their abilities. Quite frankly, the workforce has been let down by the board and yard management.

What steps will the Scottish Government now take to ensure that a board and management team are at the helm that can deliver a yard that the workforce deserves? Will the Deputy First Minister agree to meet Alex Logan, the shop steward, and me to discuss Ferguson Marine’s future? Will the Deputy First Minister say whether there is a prospect of the yard being directly awarded work at phase 2 of the small vessel replacement programme?

**Kate Forbes:** I agree with Stuart McMillan about the workforce’s ability and dedication. I would be happy to meet Alex Logan and Stuart McMillan to discuss those matters. I have spoken with Alex on a number of occasions and I hugely value his insights and commitment to the workforce.

Stuart McMillan talked about the equipment, which is why we have agreed on and allocated up to £14.2 million over the next two years in order to enhance the yard’s infrastructure and deliver productivity improvements so that it is in a better place to bid competitively. We will consider future vessel contracts from public agencies, but the board is developing its commercial strategy, which will target a range of opportunities. That will be spearheaded by the new chief executive when they come into post, which will, we hope, be shortly.

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** The Scottish National Party’s catastrophic mismanagement of Ferguson’s means that it looks as though ferries that could have been built on the west coast of Scotland will, instead, be made in eastern Europe. Phase 2 of the small vessel replacement programme is a long way off, so, in the light of what has happened, what action is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that the Glen Rosa is delivered on time? Will the Deputy First Minister deliver a statement to the Parliament on the future

of Ferguson Marine and the hundreds of jobs that depend on it?

**Kate Forbes:** The hundreds of jobs have been protected only because of the actions of the Government. The constant negativity from the Conservatives—with words such as “catastrophic” being used—does nothing to help the yard to secure work on the open market, so it is extremely frustrating to hear such comments.

The bottom line is that Ferguson Marine is focused on completing the Glen Rosa. We await, as does the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, an update from the yard on the timescales.

Ferguson Marine’s second focus is its commercial strategy, which was never predicated on only one contract, because that would not be a commercial strategy. It has additional work coming in, which we hope will be secured in April, and it is very hopeful that it will secure other contracts shortly, as David Dishon referred to in his comments yesterday. There are also opportunities relating to phase 2 of the small vessel replacement programme.

She will know that extensive analysis and legal advice indicated that a direct award of the current SVRP contract to Ferguson Marine would have introduced substantial risk that might have led to the worst of both worlds, with the boats not being delivered to islanders and Ferguson Marine not getting the contract because the matter ended up in the courts. We tried to avoid that by agreeing to an open procurement process.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** It is a sorry state of affairs when a shipyard that the SNP Government nationalised is not competitive and is unable to successfully bid for work that was widely recognised as being a good fit for Ferguson’s. To secure work, Ferguson’s needs investment and support as well as stability. In the light of the failure to secure the work for Ferguson’s, does the Scottish Government believe that the current procurement process for our ferry fleet is fit for purpose?

**Kate Forbes:** I find that question remarkable. The member has, in essence, told me that she does not think that the procurement process is fit for purpose because Ferguson Marine did not win the contract. The procurement process needs to be fair and to inspire confidence. If CMAL had made an alternative decision—it is important to stress that CMAL acted independently of ministers—there would have been questions about what else ministers had been doing.

The member asked about investment support. The bottom line is that we have agreed to invest £14.2 million in equipment for the yard so that it can compete on a global basis. She also talked

about stability. The yard's commercial strategy is very clear about the potential work that it can secure, and the yard has secured additional work. It would be nice to see the yard being recognised for the work that it has secured to date while it completes the Glen Rosa. Perhaps if we talked more about the skills and ability of people at the yard, instead of constantly talking them down, the yard might have greater potential to win work.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** As members might expect, there is great interest in today's questions. In order to get in as many members as possible, concise questions and responses would be appreciated.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** The Deputy First Minister's hubris is outstanding. Ferguson Marine has been let down not by the board but by members on the SNP front bench and the Scottish Government. If Ferguson Marine is supposed to compete on price with companies in Poland and Turkey, how on earth will it ever win any contracts? The workers of Ferguson Marine and the people of Inverclyde want to know why the Scottish Government and its agencies have lost confidence in our ability to build ships in Scotland. The Deputy First Minister has an opportunity right now to look into the camera and tell those people why that is the case.

**Kate Forbes:** I do not need to look into any camera—I have been at the yard, and I regularly speak directly to the workers.

**Jamie Greene:** Tell them!

**The Presiding Officer:** Members!

**Kate Forbes:** I find this conversation incredibly frustrating because it is not about how I feel; it is about supporting Ferguson Marine to be as competitive as possible so that it is able to secure work through a fair and open procurement process.

That is the reason for the £14.2 million investment. The commercial strategy would never rely on one contract alone. The point is that it is competing for a number of different opportunities and it has already secured some of that work. I therefore stand here reflecting on the talents and skills of the workforce in having secured work already. We will back them to be as competitive as possible with that investment in additional support.

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** Does the cabinet secretary accept that there is a social and economic value in the yard and that there would have been public value in a direct award? Does she accept that, although no shortage of money has been spent, there has been a lack of investment and that the investment now is too little and too late? Does she accept that we now need investment to ensure that future contracts are

made to Port Glasgow? Can she outline how the £14.2 million that she has referred to is to be spent?

**Kate Forbes:** I thank the member for those questions, which are very fair.

On the point about the public value of a direct award, I take that question seriously. I outlined my concern last summer, although I did not make the final decision—that is for CMAL—that, in a very litigious industry, going down the direct award route would have created significant levels of risk that could have resulted in the contract being in the courts, which would have ensured that Ferguson Marine did not get the work when it needed it and that the islanders did not get the vessels. The member might shake her head at that but, looking at the legal advice and the analysis that was done, I am afraid that that was a real and pressing possibility. The route that we have taken ensures that we have reached the significant milestone of delivering seven new vessels for our islanders.

The member is right to talk about investment. Although a lot of attention has been given to the funds that have been given by the Government to deliver the Glen Rosa and the Glen Sannox, that is not the same as investing in the yard itself. The £14.2 million is based on a list of equipment and infrastructure priorities at the yard that Ferguson Marine has supplied to us that will make it globally competitive.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Can the Deputy First Minister confirm that the permanent secretary advised the Scottish Government that it would be illegal to make a direct award? That is certainly what he told the Finance and Public Administration Committee this morning. Can she also expand on what the seven small vessels will mean for our rural and island communities?

**Kate Forbes:** The seven small vessels will be absolutely transformational for our island communities. How challenging it has been for those islanders has been well documented. They will supplement the six larger vessels that are due to come into service over these years. There is no doubt that they will be transformational. This is an important milestone, and we have to make sure that the procurement process is complete and that the boats are delivered.

On the legal advice, there was extensive analysis and legal advice that indicated that a direct award of the small vessel replacement programme contract to Ferguson Marine could have introduced substantial risks, meaning that the yard did not have ships to build and our islanders did not have the ships that they need.



That was not a risk that I thought was appropriate to introduce into the process.

### Hospital Equipment (Replacement)

**2. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government for what reason hospitals are reportedly still using MRI scanners, CT scanners and X-ray machines that are decades old, in light of reported warnings by experts that equipment over 10 years old should be replaced. (S6T-02426)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** Jackie Baillie will appreciate that equipment does not cease to function as soon as it reaches 10 years old. However, we know that equipment does not have an infinite lifespan, and life-cycle replacement planning is on-going. That includes a radiotherapy replacement programme, which is supported by annual funding, including £18.5 million this year. A further £19 million has been allocated for equipment investment, as part of additional funding that is being provided to the portfolio at the spring budget revision, to support the replacement of ultrasound and X-ray machines and other imaging equipment.

The 2025-26 budget provides a 5 per cent uplift to boards' core capital allocations to support maintenance and replacement programmes. A further £30 million supports priority equipment replacement, based on boards' assessment of need.

**Jackie Baillie:** In hospitals across Scotland, patients are going back to the future, with vital MRI and CT scanners that are often more than 15 years old and X-ray machines that are up to 27 years old. The cabinet secretary will be aware of the independent report that has recommended that CT and MRI machines that are more than 10 years old should be retired. The Society of Radiographers has said that

"older equipment is unreliable"

and

"is often operationally slower".

First, how far does unreliable equipment contribute to the current diagnostic waiting times? Secondly, given the extra £2.5 billion for Scotland's national health service from the United Kingdom Labour Government, will the cabinet secretary confirm when the out-of-date machines will be replaced?

**Neil Gray:** I believe that I already answered the second part of Jackie Baillie's question in my first answer about the resources that we are allocating to boards, which take the decisions. It is also for boards to make a risk-based analysis of the appropriateness of the equipment that they have—including parts, availability and maintenance—and

of its reliability and productivity. We make our assessments on that basis.

On the first part of her question, Jackie Baillie will know that we are already seeing improvements in diagnostic waiting lists. Quarter 4 of 2024 had the fourth-largest improvement since the pandemic. At the end of December, the waiting list had reduced by more than 18,000 compared with the end of 2024. Significant progress is being made in diagnostic testing, and there is more to come with the budget—which Jackie Baillie did not vote for.

**Jackie Baillie:** Far be it from me to point out that it was the UK Labour Government that gave you the money, and the Scottish National Party failed to vote for it—

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** It is our money.

**Jackie Baillie:** The SNP failed to vote for that in Westminster. That is just a fact.

The cabinet secretary set out the money, but he did not say when the machines would be replaced. We know that outdated equipment is only part of the story. Only a few weeks ago, I asked the First Minister about the reported shortage of clinical radiologists, which is projected to rise to a total of 263 fewer posts than will be needed by 2028. The effects of that are being felt now. The latest diagnostic waiting list data shows that, at the end of last year, there were 3,954 waits of more than a year, which is an 11.7 per cent increase in the space of a year. When will those long waits be eradicated, to ensure that patients who need tests are seen without any further delay?

**Neil Gray:** I have already set out the high-level data around waiting times. The latest figures show that our plan to bring down waiting times is delivering. That was part of a £30 million investment in this financial year, and we are investing £100 million in the coming year. The £30 million delivered almost 56,500 diagnostic procedures, which exceeded the original plan to deliver 40,000. The figure is up by 41 per cent, reducing the waiting list for imaging by almost 12 per cent and that for scopes by more than 4 per cent.

On the plan that we have in place, I remind Jackie Baillie that she did not support the budget that saw that money going into the system so as to get those reductions in waiting times. She wants to see the end without willing the means. We are delivering on that, and I look forward to reporting more to Parliament in that regard in due course.

**Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):** Unlike Jackie Baillie, I was proud to vote, along with the cabinet secretary, for the Scottish budget that provided that record direct investment for our

national health service here in Scotland. It is really important that we recognise that the money that is involved in that is Scotland's money, and it is for this Parliament to decide how that money is allocated. I voted for it, the cabinet secretary voted for it, and Jackie Baillie and her colleagues did not.

Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on his engagement with health boards regarding the potential for that funding to be used to update equipment, while encouraging conversations on increasing innovation across the NHS and social care?

**Neil Gray:** On this budget and budgets past, we have taken decisions here in Scotland to raise additional revenue by using the Parliament's powers on taxation, which the Labour Party apparently no longer supports.

We are already working with all health boards to develop a whole-system NHS infrastructure plan that focuses on reform, innovation and resilience. That includes specific consideration of on-going work on the equipment replacement cycle, which is being undertaken by the NHS national equipment group. The first part of that whole-system planning work is to assess immediate priorities and is well under way. It includes an assessment of equipment replacement priorities and will be supported by funding of £30 million in the coming financial year. That is in addition to the funding that is already allocated to the radiotherapy equipment programme each year.

### Single-sex Spaces (Public Sector Guidance)

#### 3. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will review public sector guidance on single-sex spaces, in light of reported concerns about the Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Prison Service. (S6T-02422)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** In April 2022, the Equality and Human Rights Commission published some revisions to its guidance, "Separate and single-sex service providers: a guide on the Equality Act sex and gender reassignment provisions." In that guide, the commission clearly states that, as the regulator for the Equality Act 2010, it provides

"guidance on the law to help organisations comply with their legal obligations."

The commission has recently completed a consultation on its statutory code of practice, which

"sets out the steps that should be taken to ensure people are not discriminated against."

The code of practice explains

"how the Equality Act 2010 works in relation to the provision of services, public functions and associations"

and provides practical examples to illustrate how the law can be used to protect equality. The updated code of practice has yet to be published.

The Scottish Government expects all relevant organisations to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and other legislation in their role as employers.

**Tess White:** The cabinet secretary may be interested to know that the Care Inspectorate's "Guidance for children and young people's services on the inclusion of transgender including non-binary young people" makes the following statement:

"The provision of gendered facilities such as toilets is social convention. There is no law in Scotland about this."

Does the Scottish Government agree with the Care Inspectorate's statement?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The provisions of the Equality Act 2010, including those relating to single-sex spaces and the general exception relating to communal residential accommodation, apply to Scotland. Any issues of how those are operating in particular situations are matters for the EHRC as the enforcement body for the act and for the relevant public body concerned.

**Tess White:** The answer is "no".

That is a ludicrous and, frankly, a chilling statement from a regulator that is supposed to protect Scotland's most vulnerable children and young people. There are massive safeguarding issues arising from that reckless guidance.

However, it is not just the Care Inspectorate. The Scottish Prison Service is in the spotlight once again because it is allowing trans-identifying prison officers to perform intimate and utterly unacceptable rub-down searches of vulnerable women who are visiting the prison estate. Violent trans-identifying men can still be housed in the female prison estate in certain circumstances.

Will the Scottish Government finally do the decent thing, lay down the law for Scotland's public bodies and tell them to withdraw ill-informed and insidious guidance that allows the rights of male-bodied individuals to transcend those of women and girls?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** With regard to the part of the member's question relating to the Care Inspectorate, I note that everyone in Scotland deserves to receive safe and high-quality care that meets their needs and respects their rights and choices. It is very important that the rights of all those who are involved are considered and respected in everything that is done.

In respect of the Scottish Prison Service, the member will be aware that new rules with provisions on visitors were introduced in 2023. The law states that visitors are to be searched in accordance with rule 106 of those rules. Consent is required. Rule 106(3) makes it clear that general searching of the person or their clothing is to be done by an officer

“of the same gender as the visitor”.

The search must be completed

“as quickly and decently as possible”

and the use of force is not permitted.

Rule 106(4) states:

“A visitor who is being searched ... cannot be required to remove, and a search ... must not involve the removal of, any clothing other than an outer coat, jacket, headgear, gloves and footwear.”

**Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba):** With another week comes another egregious breach of the human rights of women and girls, this time impacting on vulnerable children in care and on women on the prison estate, many of whom will have backgrounds involving trauma.

Does the Government not understand that promoting illegal and illiterate gender self-identification policies that override and nullify sex-based safeguarding and giving out access-all-area passes is completely unacceptable? When will the Government wake up to its obligations to ensure that public bodies follow the law? Will it ensure safeguarding and that women’s human rights are upheld before the next scandal unfolds, which will probably be next week?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** As I have made clear on many occasions, the Scottish Government strongly supports the separate and single-sex exemptions in the Equality Act 2010, which can allow for people to be excluded when that is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

In my original answer, I also mentioned the important guidance published by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the commission’s work to update the statutory code of practice. I look forward to the commission continuing that work and to the publication of that updated code of practice.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes topical question time. I will allow a moment or two for those on the front benches to reorganise themselves.

## Food and Drink Sector

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16839, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on protecting and growing Scotland’s iconic food and drink sector. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:32

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** It is vital that, as a Parliament, we take the time to discuss our iconic food and drink and how we can help to protect and grow the sector in an ever-changing world.

Our food and drink sector is hugely important to Scotland and is a success story that we are determined to build on. It is a bedrock of the Scottish economy and is a £15 billion industry, with more than 17,000 businesses employing around 129,000 people and touching communities the length and breadth of Scotland. Jobs in the industry account for 4.9 per cent of total employment in Scotland, and I know that every member here will be able to give examples of businesses in their constituencies that contribute to those figures.

Generations of farmers, fishermen, brewers, distillers and chefs work tirelessly every day, with passion and skill, to create some of the best produce in the world. Our processors, wholesalers and grocers also play a vital role in showcasing the very best of that produce and bringing it to us. I thank all the businesses that contribute to the success of the sector; we are determined to work with them and to support them in partnership. I recognise the contributions from everyone involved in keeping this dynamic, complex and highly interconnected sector operating and supplying food and drink to the people of Scotland, and beyond, each and every day.

I know how important it is to work together with industry to help those businesses thrive, which is why the Scottish Government continues to support the Scotland Food & Drink partnership to deliver its strategy, “Sustaining Scotland. Supplying the World.” We have provided £10 million of funding so far towards that industry-led strategy for the sector, which was launched in 2023. The Scotland Food & Drink partnership is a unique and valuable asset and I cannot stress enough how much I value the collaboration between Government and our key partners to further the interests of the sector.

I will highlight some of the work on that strategy that is being taken forward by the partnership. Ten

I will highlight some of the work on that strategy that is being taken forward by the partnership. Ten

years ago, we launched the food and drink export plan, supported by Scotland Food & Drink, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, Opportunity North East, Salmon Scotland, Scottish Development International, Seafood Scotland and Quality Meat Scotland. Under that plan, we have in-market specialists placed in key markets around the world to champion Scottish products to buyers, and they work with teams back in Scotland to help producers to take advantage of export opportunities. I meet the in-market specialists regularly and hear at first hand about the really creative and exciting work that they are doing to promote Scottish products across the globe. That work is fundamental to growth of the sector. Exports of Scottish food and drink were worth £7.6 billion in 2023 and they made up around a third of the total food and drink exports from the UK, with Scottish salmon accounting for £844 million of exports last year, and Scotch whisky accounting for £5.6 billion.

Alongside the quality and integrity of our produce, one of our most valuable assets is the soft power of Scotland and our brand. Across the globe, a wealth of support and friendliness is directed towards our nation, and we must harness those ties of friendship to help our exports to grow and, thus, underpin high-quality jobs and prosperity in our economy.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for taking an intervention, and I wish her well for the future. On the point about being competitive in the European and global markets, does she think that it would be to the benefit of Scotland's farmers to bring forward precision breeding technology so that they, too, can become competitive?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I thank the member for her first point, but I assure her that I am not going anywhere yet. On her second point, we want to have a wide-ranging conversation around gene editing and the technology, which is why we have committed to holding a round-table discussion next week. It is about having a wider discussion with academics, our farming industry and wider civil society so that we can go through that. We do not want to rush it in the way that the UK Government did.

We are also focusing on the opportunities that are presented by the UK market. We are growing sales of Scottish products by holding meet-the-buyer events, linking up producers and suppliers, and placing experts in Scottish products with national retailers and wholesalers. For the first time, we have an in-market specialist based in London, who is already making a difference, with new relationships being formed and business won. Closer to home, the work in Scotland continues.

We know that Scottish consumers want to be able to buy more Scottish products—indeed, I know that that is a keen area of interest for MSPs across the Parliament.

The Scottish Government supports work in both the retail and out-of-home markets to achieve that. That is why I am delighted to announce that, as of 1 April, we will provide another £100,000 as part of the Scotland Food & Drink partnership regional food fund. We already have a well-recognised and established sector, but the fund provides further support by encouraging small businesses to thrive and fostering collaboration among producers and food groups. Through remarkable initiatives such as that, we are providing small projects with the opportunity to promote and showcase their regional goods.

As we consider the success in the past decade and prepare to launch the next round of the fund, we are reflecting on past rounds, where we have witnessed so much good work. That includes the creation of food and drink trails and seafood festivals, small producers expanding their reach, local distilleries crafting unique events, online campaigns promoting soft fruits and Scottish tea, and food tourism opportunities that have brought people together over a shared love of food.

Scotland has an amazing reputation for quality food and drink, which we want to capitalise on. With that in mind, last year saw the launch of the new “Naturally Scottish” branding, which is used both here at home and in export markets. It is a fantastic articulation of our industry and of the people, the places and the pride and passion that are involved in all that we do.

Another key piece of work that I am proud that we are taking forward is making Scotland a good food nation. This Government is committed to ensuring that everyone in Scotland has reliable and dignified access to safe, nutritious, affordable, enjoyable and sustainable food. We want to have a thriving food culture and a prosperous and innovative food and drink sector. As I hope that I have already outlined, there is so much to be proud of regarding Scottish food.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** Given that the ambition is for everyone to be able to have good food, when is that going to come into the national health service?

**Mairi Gougeon:** The work of health is, of course, integral to the work on the good food nation, and that is really what the plan is about. It is about us publishing that plan and setting out, as a Scottish Government, how we are not working in silos, because we know that food policy touches all those critical areas, and how we are trying to address some of the key challenges that we face.

The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 provides the framework for our future food strategy. It places duties on Scottish ministers, local authorities and health boards to produce plans of their policies in relation to food and set out what they will do to make those plans real. We look forward to publishing our first national good food nation plan later this year. It will set out our high-level aspirations for a good food nation and outline how we plan to embed long-term strategic transformation into decision making about food policy.

There is much to be positive about when it comes to growth in the sector. However, all of that is in spite of some of the key challenges that industry has faced—not least Brexit, which has been an unmitigated disaster for our food and drink businesses. Very few days pass without a Brexit-related challenge being highlighted to me, from a lack of labour to impacts on exports. The Government remains firmly committed to a future within the European Union single market and the benefits that would come from that for our producers and consumers. Our food and drink sector, perhaps more than other sectors, faces the pressures of rising costs that are caused by Brexit and on-going conflicts across the world, the complexities of climate change and the ever-evolving demands of consumers.

Importantly, that brings me to food security. Until recently, it is fair to say, we all took food security for granted, thanks to the stability of the global system of trade. In recent years, things have become more volatile, which means that we are putting more of our efforts into ensuring food security in Scotland. That includes providing continued support to help our primary producers manage that volatility and produce food sustainably.

Unfortunately, providing that stability and certainty is made all the more difficult as a result of having no multiyear budget allocation support from the UK Government. We have already had to act urgently on a number of occasions—including the outbreak of war in Ukraine, which, among other things, has significantly affected energy prices and the availability of some key commodities. With the industry, we set up a short-life task force and implemented its recommendations to increase the resilience of the sector. We in the Government strengthened our relationships with key partners around the world, recognising that food security is a global issue that we cannot address alone.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Given what we heard from farming stakeholders and members of the agriculture reform implementation oversight board in last week's Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, which suggested that the Scottish Government did not

speak the language of farmers, and given the real concerns about the progress that has been made, what faith should we have in any policies as we go forward?

**Mairi Gougeon:** We are intent on working with our farmers and crofters on developing future policy. I understand that some people would like us to go further and faster, but we are only in the position that we are in because we are trying to get things right. In working with our key partners, we are making good progress. It is certainly a lot better than the travesties that are emerging down south.

Food resilience and food security are not something that we can achieve alone. In June 2024, I hosted an international food summit, gathering representatives from key international organisations and Scottish stakeholders to discuss the role of local solutions in addressing international problems. That summit was hugely successful, and those who attended were keen to continue that engagement. To that end, later this year, we will host a conference to focus on Scotland's research and evidence on food security and invite exchange to foster those relationships.

Scotland is eager to play its part and show leadership in international efforts to tackle issues that affect food systems. Given that we have limited control over those risks, it is more important than ever that we work with the sector and other Governments to ensure that, while the sector is supported to grow sustainably, we carefully consider our food security and, at a minimum, do not unintentionally reduce it. That must be recognised as a priority at all levels of Government, in order to get ahead of the curve and bake in the right choices.

If we do not do that, we could inadvertently reduce the availability, affordability, quality or stability of our national food supply. That is why, recently, I brought the issue to the Cabinet, so that it could consider how food security and food system resilience can be part of the agenda in every portfolio across the Scottish Government. That work is on-going.

Sometimes, however, the threats to industry come from closer to home. Recently, an application was lodged with the UK Government for the provision of geographical indication status for English whisky. That has caused the industry real concern over the watering down of the definition of single malt. Although geographical indications are a reserved area, they are a highly coveted signifier of quality and provenance.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that, in the House of Commons—just the week before last, I think—Darren Jones said:

"I can confirm that we will not be watering down the definition of single malt whisky."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 4 March 2025; Vol 763, c 155.]

That is a direct quote. Will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Although those verbal assurances were offered in the UK Parliament that day, the consultation on the English whisky GI is still very much open. We have received no confirmation from the UK Government that it intends to change course.

Scotland is lucky in the breadth of protected products that come from all over our islands and mainland, be that Arbroath smokies, Stornoway black pudding or Orkney Island cheddar. Our products are sought after and should be afforded the protection from imitation that they deserve. The GI scheme must exist to protect products individually and collectively. However, let me be crystal clear: any attempt to include products that are apparently comparable but have lesser production processes undermines not only the GI scheme but consumer confidence, both here and in our vital export markets.

I know that there has been significant interest in the recent application. Given the reserved nature of the application process, I continue to encourage anyone with concerns to respond to that consultation, which is open until 20 May.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** The issue of the Scotch whisky definition being changed as a result of the proposal for a definition of English whisky concerns me as well. Will the cabinet secretary confirm her understanding of what the proposal is?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Absolutely. As I highlighted in my previous response to Daniel Johnson, it is still very much a live issue. It has certainly not been resolved; that is certainly not what we are hearing from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which is dealing with the application. [*Interruption.*] The consultation is still very much open. That is why I encourage members— [*Interruption.*] I am sorry, but I have taken a number of interventions, and I really have to make progress. I am drawing towards a close.

Although I realise that I am rapidly running out of time, there is another important matter that I want to touch on today, which is other barriers to trade and how we can potentially see progress in relation to those.

I have already mentioned the impact of global instability on food and drink businesses. The impact of Brexit continues to be felt at the border through the post-Brexit regime of checks and controls under the border target operating model, which was published in 2023. Overall, additional trade barriers and red tape faced by our exporters

continue to hamper business and trade flow with the EU, and we know that there are significant issues around imports. The new UK Government has indicated a willingness to open negotiations with the EU on a sanitary and phytosanitary—SPS—and veterinary agreement, to remove the need for many of those checks. The Scottish Government stands ready to work together to achieve the best possible results to protect Scotland's interests.

It is clear that our food and drink industry is vulnerable to global currents, be that Brexit, geopolitical issues, or the tragic conflicts that are taking place around the world. However, it remains an industry with enormous potential and great ambition. We are doing much in Scotland to support this exciting sector, and the future is positive. In safeguarding our industry, we have to secure its long-term sustainability and empower it to thrive in the face of those challenges. I assure members that this Government will do everything in its power to do that.

I am pleased to move the motion in my name, and ask members across the chamber to support it.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the value and importance of Scotland's food and drink sector in terms of economic benefits, its particular importance to Scotland's rural and island communities and, importantly, its role in enhancing Scotland's reputation on a global scale; further recognises the risks of the proposal for an English whisky geographical indication that could undermine Scotch whisky and single malt, which is central to the economy; acknowledges the challenges and opportunities faced by the sector in an ever-changing world; calls for cross-party support to ensure that the sector continues to receive backing and support in order to grow sustainably and contribute to a prosperous and thriving economy; notes the new risk from tariffs, and calls on the UK Government to do all that it can to protect Scotland's businesses and consumers from their impact.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Tim Eagle to speak to and move amendment S6M-16839.2.

14:47

**Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests, as a small farmer.

Writing a speech on Scotland's food and drink is no easy task, for Scotland creates a vast range of world-renowned food and drink—from the fresh catch of the day across our coastal regions to spirits, fruits and more. We have fruits from Angus Growers in Fife, Angus and Perthshire; cullen skink with fresh-caught fish from Shetland; the iconic Inn Bru from AG Barr in Glasgow; Bon Accord drinks, with their big natural flavours; and Aberdeen Angus steak, produced to the highest welfare standards on the rolling hills of Aberdeenshire. For vegetarians, Macsween of

Edinburgh has a range of vegan and vegetarian options, which can perhaps be accompanied by chips from the Real Fresh Chip Co in Fife. We should be proud of Scotland's leading role in potato production, with Scotland exporting more than 92,000 tonnes of high-health-status seed potatoes—and do not forget that East of Scotland Growers supply a wide range of quality vegetables.

Tourists and locals can delight in one of Harry Gow's delicious cakes from the Highlands, ice cream from Arran Dairies, cheesecake from Aulds Delicious Desserts, cakes from Reids of Caithness, or Rowan Glen yoghurts. If that does not fill us up, perhaps we can all sit back and enjoy some of Angus Robertson's cultural delights with a packet of Mackie's crisps, a cheese board with Orkney cheddar and some smoked salmon from Stornoway Smokehouse, all washed down with a wee dram of Scotch whisky—but do not forget to add a drop of water, which is essential, according to Jack Gemmell at Chivas Brothers. I can create a stunning tour through Scotland's iconic, fresh, high-quality food and drink sector, in which producers employ thousands of staff.

The sector contributes 14.6 per cent gross value added of total UK food and drink manufacturing, and 31.3 per cent of total UK food and drink exports. The Scotch whisky industry alone makes up £3 in every £100 of Scottish GVA, totalling 77 per cent of Scotland's food and drink exports, which are worth £5.3 billion to the Scottish economy. It pains me to see that the industry was startled by the GI announcement down in England, which my colleagues will touch on later in the debate.

Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting Scotland's Rural College's new vertical farm, which explores new ways of supporting food production and security. In January, SRUC opened the £1.8 million facility, which is dedicated to teaching students about growing crops more quickly, and with higher nutritional value, while using less water. I am confident that the project will play its part in the future of food security in Scotland, and I wish SRUC well with it.

It is important to me that we start on positives because behind the businesses that I have mentioned are our constituents, our friends and perhaps our families, who, every day, play their roles in supporting Scotland's food and drink economy. I am proud to talk about Scotland's food and drink sector, but that does not take away the challenges that exist. I have already had companies contacting me about the UK Labour Government's national insurance increases, which are causing real concern. On top of already increased costs, that was a bitter blow for many businesses, and it will cost jobs in the sector.

In January, the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers raised concerns about a potential shortage in our red meat supply due to a fall in the numbers of cattle. Scott Walker, the association's chief executive, expressed serious concern, warning that that decline was

"likely to be felt on retail shelves"

in the future.

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has warned that the industry risks being "crushed" because of planned significant growth of floating offshore wind power in Scottish waters and the UK Government's ambition to reset relationships with the EU. Fishermen tell me of their concerns over current arrangements for non-UK boats in our waters, which present dangers from overfishing and bad practice.

Infrastructure is required in many areas. In my own area, nearly 40 rural jobs will be lost when a rural food producer, New World Foods in Forres, closes on 30 April. The factory's owner, Valeo Foods UK, cited a number of logistical challenges presented by the site's location that have made it

"increasingly difficult to maintain cost efficiencies".

I do not claim to know the full details, but what might a dualled A9 or A96 have done to keep those essential jobs in remote rural areas such as Forres? Transport, along with energy prices and labour, remain key issues for the industry, which the Scottish Government must address with clarity and vision.

The cabinet secretary's motion calls for cross-party support. As regards talking up our food and drink sector, standing side by side to protect Scottish whisky, or shouting loudly about our products, I welcome such consensus. However, my job in Parliament includes pointing out where the Scottish National Party Government has made mistakes, when things are not right and when more needs to be done. For example, the decision not to pass on business rate relief support to the hospitality sector was a huge mistake. That lack of support has stifled growth and deferred investment. The deposit return scheme caused confusion and worry across the drinks sector and was ultimately paused for the long term, but not before costing the industry significant sums of money. The SNP's failure to factor in costs and the implications of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 was a real concern.

The Scottish Government has yet to produce a finalised good food nation plan, but, like many others, I eagerly anticipate its publication later this year. As Finlay Carson has just mentioned, last week, the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee heard from farmers and industry representatives that changes to agricultural policy are too slow and

that key information is not getting to the ground. [Interruption.] The minister might look at me across the chamber, but that is true—it is what they said last week.

For me, there remains a lack of urgency over future agricultural support, with no clear accepted plan to restore livestock numbers and support food production, or to encourage new entrants and young farmers. The SNP's delivery of cuts to college funding across Scotland is causing a recruitment crisis and a skills shortage. According to the Scottish Funding Council, 8,000 fewer college places have been made available in the past year. Delays to the dualling of the A9, little progress on roads such as the A83 Rest and Be Thankful, and never-ending issues with ferries are all causing significant challenges to food and drink businesses across rural Scotland and on our islands. If Scotland is to achieve its goal for farming, fishing and food and drink to be Scotland's most valuable industries by 2030, recognised at home and abroad as a model of collaboration and a world leader in responsible, profitable growth, it will need far more and far clearer Government support.

I would never deny the challenges that have come from Brexit, Covid or conflict around the world, but I was interested to read in the Scottish Parliament information centre report, "Scotland's exports—policy and statistics", that, in aggregate, seafood exports have not declined markedly following the UK's exit from the EU, but there has been a considerable switch in terms of the markets and the products being exported, including increases in exports to France, the Netherlands, Poland and Lithuania. That is welcome news. Markets change over time, and I am aware that some parts of the industry are progressing exciting opportunities in new markets around the world. Interestingly, the same report notes that beverage exports have also shown no sign of change since the UK has left the EU.

I will quickly mention gene editing. I worry that, too often, people see the word "gene" and immediately picture thousands of genetically engineered giant lettuces, or it conjures up images of crops taking over entire ecosystems. I accept that there are concerns over genetically modified organisms, but gene editing, in my understanding, is a very different thing. Using well-known methods to modify existing genetic material in a way that can yield more beneficial outcomes, this technology could help to tweak the performance of crops to help with disease resistance and drought tolerance or to produce higher yields.

The Scottish agricultural industry has called for the adoption of precision breeding technology and has highlighted the technology's potential to strengthen food security and address climate

change. Organisations such as the Agricultural Industries Confederation Scotland and NFU Scotland have urged the Scottish Government to align with recent precision breeding legislation that has already been enacted in England.

As with all new technologies, a careful, considered approach is always safest, but there is a difference between gene editing and genetic modification, and perhaps it is about time that the Scottish Government thought again about its use in Scotland. I hope that we all want to see a thriving and successful food industry.

**Finlay Carson:** New Zealand is making significant strides in updating its gene editing technology, along with Spain, France, Italy and the Netherlands, which are actively supporting new rules, in stark contrast to Scotland's position. Do you believe that the Scottish Government is, once again, dragging its feet and that it will end up failing our farmers, growers and researchers?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** I do not believe one way or t'other, Mr Carson, and I ask you to always speak through the chair. Tim Eagle—I can give you the time back.

**Tim Eagle:** I always like to show that the Scottish Government is dragging its feet—and certainly, on things such as agricultural policy, it has been. I agree that, if we are looking towards the future in an uncertain world, gene editing is a good option for us, and the Government should be actively looking at it. Countries around the world are looking at it. It is a much safer method, and we should be doing it. I hope that we all want to see a thriving, successful food and drink sector.

In the uncertain world that we live in, we must be ready to fight for our producers. The risks of tariffs have never been so high, and diplomacy is acutely important at this time. My Scottish Conservative colleagues and I stand with the food and drink industry. In 2024, we promised to increase the UK-wide farming budget by £1 billion to allow farmers to spend more money on domestic food production. We would extend the seasonal worker visa scheme for agricultural labourers and support a review of the skilled workers visa for the fishing sector. We would look to strike the right balance between conservation and food security and support new entrants getting into farming and fishing to ensure our food security for generations. We would work for and with businesses, knowing the importance of supporting our valuable private sector.

There is much to shout about and to be proud about in supporting Scottish food and drink, but there is also much to be done to further support this vital Scottish industry, from its primary producers to global corporations. My thanks to all those who work in this vital sector across our



Scottish communities, and here's to a successful year ahead.

I move amendment S6M-16839.2, to leave out from "notes the new" to end and insert:

"recognises the need to rapidly deliver key infrastructure projects to aid the movement of goods and services, particularly in remote and rural communities; notes that further exploration of gene-editing technology should be undertaken in order to improve plant resilience and domestic food security; believes that the failed implementation of the Deposit Return Scheme, the further review of restrictions on marketing and sponsorship of alcoholic products, and the failure to fully pass on rates relief to all of Scotland's hospitality operators has driven up costs and created uncertainty for food and drink businesses; welcomes the commitment by food and drink businesses to enhance self-regulation; notes the risk from tariffs, and calls on both of Scotland's governments to do all that they can to protect businesses and consumers from their impact."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Rhoda Grant to speak to and move amendment S6M-16839.1.

14:58

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** In Scotland, we are blessed with world-recognised high-quality food and drink, from Scottish whisky to Scottish salmon, to Orkney Gold, to—of course—Stornoway black pudding. I could cite many more examples from the Highlands and Islands alone. The debate gives members the opportunity to list the wonderful produce from their constituencies and regions.

However, this year, there are more serious matters to debate. The talk of trade wars and tariffs creates uncertainty for our food and drink industry. We need to build trade agreements that allow our produce to be sold around the world, but agreements must never be to the detriment of our standards.

It is not just about maintaining standards—the quality and quantity of Scottish produce is something to celebrate, and the renowned status of our food and drink must be harnessed and promoted internationally. However, the SNP, despite claiming to represent Scotland, has not done a good job of exporting Scotland's produce to the world.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Rhoda Grant:** That is why Scottish Labour's brand Scotland campaign is so important—it will drive and boost investment and exports. Brand Scotland utilises UK Government infrastructure to focus on investments and trade strategies that are good for Scotland, which enhances Scotland's international presence and drives economic growth.

**Tim Eagle:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Rhoda Grant:** I was going to accept the intervention from Rachael Hamilton.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Rachael Hamilton. Be brief, please.

**Rachael Hamilton:** There is concern about the rise in employer national insurance contributions. You talk so highly of our produce, but the British Growers Association has said that fruit and veg prices could increase by 10 or 12 per cent as a result of that rise. What would you say to your UK colleagues about the national insurance contribution rise?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that all comments should be made through the chair, please.

**Rhoda Grant:** *[Interruption.]* My colleague behind me suggests that we should hear a bit of humility from Rachael Hamilton about clearing up the mess that was left by the previous UK Government.

It is clear that fostering international investment in key sectors is central to support for our food and drink sector. Having a good relationship with the Scotland Office and the extensive network of UK embassies worldwide can effectively promote Scottish products and services.

**Mairi Gougeon:** I take issue with some of Rhoda Grant's points in relation to the brand Scotland initiative. I outlined in my speech the investment—which I hope that Rhoda Grant welcomes—that we have made in the food and drink export plan, and all the work that we are doing with our in-market specialists. Does she acknowledge that trade is a reserved policy matter, and recognise the damage that has been done as a result of the trade deals that were made by the previous UK Government, which sold us down the river and took us out of the EU, which was our biggest single market?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I advise members that there is no time in hand, so interventions should therefore be brief. I can give you that time back, though, Ms Grant.

**Rhoda Grant:** Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer.

That is it—there is another plan, but we need action.

The Scottish Government motion talks about protection of English whisky posing a risk to Scottish whisky, but in that regard, the cabinet secretary seeks to cause a disagreement where one does not exist. As Daniel Johnson said, the UK Government has made it clear that it will not support any moves to change the definition of

“single malt”, which should provide reassurance to members.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Rhoda Grant:** I am not taking any more interventions—I am running out of time.

That said, Scottish whisky already competes in a global whisky market, and we more than hold our own against whiskies from Ireland, Taiwan and Japan, to mention only a few. The Scottish Government must also publicise and promote our industry, and it needs to highlight that our whisky industry is at the forefront in trying to get to net zero. Whisky that is being distilled today will not be consumed for four years at the very earliest, and the best will age for 10, 12 or 18 years in order to receive premium prices.

Those whiskies will be sold in a world that is very different from the one that we are in today. Consumers will want to know not only the provenance, but the carbon footprint, of what they are drinking. The whisky industry cannot do that in a vacuum: it works with farmers who produce the raw material, it looks to renewable energy for its heat production and it utilises what are sometimes all-too-copious amounts of water. There are real opportunities for other industries and communities to work with the whisky sector to learn and gain from its innovation and experience.

Our Scottish salmon is another iconic product, and its worldwide recognition and trade benefits to Scotland should not be underestimated. That is why governance and oversight of the industry must improve. The Scottish Government has done nothing to streamline regulation of the industry: that regulation is clunky and time consuming. It is little wonder, therefore, that the industry is owned largely by multinationals, because they are the only ones with pockets deep enough to enable them to deal with our governance structures. The Scottish Government needs to provide better governance and transparency to allow the industry to flourish, while protecting our environment and reputation.

Our amendment highlights the Food and Drink Federation’s estimate that the sector needs nearly 35,000 new recruits by 2031 to fill its skills gap. With universities in crisis and colleges cut to the bone, it is difficult to see how we can, in any industry, provide the trained workforce that is required. The Scottish Government must ensure that our young people are equipped with the skills that the industry demands.

The motion highlights the importance of rural and island communities to the sector, so there must be better local vocational and educational

opportunities to ensure that young people have the option to gain skills close to home.

Future skills must be part of an industrial strategy. In devising that strategy, we need to ask ourselves what the food and drink businesses of the future will look like, and how our workers will acquire the skills that will be needed to continue to capitalise on our excellent products and to promote that excellence.

**Douglas Ross:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Rhoda Grant:** I have taken a number of interventions, and I am running out of time, so I must continue.

Many of our primary food producers work in the islands and in rural Scotland. However, the Scottish Government is not building homes in rural Scotland. That means that the workforce is depleted and young people are being driven to our cities.

Producers also need good reliable routes to market in order to ensure the quality and freshness of their products. That counts, whether they are transporting goods around the world or within Scotland. Our islands’ fish processors have a daily battle to try to get their produce to the mainland and beyond. A ferry cancellation because of yet another breakdown plays havoc with that need. That situation forces those industries to consider moving to the mainland, which will decimate our island economies. There are jobs in fish processing; however, processors get their products from a myriad of small boats, so they would need catches to be transported to the mainland, but those boats are far too small to land in mainland ports. Therefore, if the processors move out, the boats will have nowhere to sell their catches.

Our shellfish is also recognised for its excellence worldwide. To keep that reputation and gain us national and international benefit, it needs to be kept fresh. Therefore, we need to make it fairer and easier for the whole industry to work and trade.

With all that said, it is sad that, in a country such as ours that is renowned for its produce, many of our citizens live in food poverty. It is simply wrong that people are forced to get their nutrition from food banks. I long for the day when the need for food banks is a thing of the past.

We are rightly proud of our reputation for excellence in the food and drink industry. To sustain and grow our food and drink industry domestically as well as internationally, businesses need modern and fit-for-purpose transportation networks. They also need skilled employees in order that they can grow their operations. Those

employees need homes to live in in order to nurture communities and the workers of the future.

To promote our food and drink, we need to protect its reputation and excellence while ensuring that we achieve net zero. Reputations need to be actively maintained and sustained. We need to ensure that our food and drink sector has the Government backing that it needs.

I move amendment S6M-16839.1, to insert at end:

“; notes the further risk to Scotland’s food and drink industry posed by rural depopulation, caused by a lack of housing supply and weakened transport links; acknowledges that the Food and Drink Federation estimates that the sector needs nearly 35,000 new recruits by 2031 to fill skills gaps; welcomes the commitment by the UK Labour administration to not water down the legal definition of single malt whisky; believes that the Scottish Government can do more to promote the unique nature of Scotch whisky and other Scottish food and drink exports to maximise the reach of Brand Scotland; calls on the Scottish Government to work across every department to drive a coherent strategy on food and drink as part of a wider industrial strategy, and further calls for clear career pathways in these industries to address skills gaps and drive excellence in the world-famous sector.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Grant. I remind members that there is now no time in hand. I encourage any interventions to be brief and to be made through the chair.

15:08

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I begin by extending my best wishes for the future to the cabinet secretary in the light of her announcement that she will step down next year. It has been a pleasure to work with her to ensure a thriving future for our rural communities. I look forward to continuing to do so in the time that we have left.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss Scottish food and drink. I support the acknowledgement in the Government’s motion that the sector is important to rural and island communities and the idea that food and drink play a key role in Scotland’s global reputation. I also support Labour’s amendment, especially because it identifies the need to fill skills gaps and recognises the importance of people to the food and drink sector.

However, I would welcome clarity on what is happening on whisky designation, because we have not heard that yet. The motion and the Labour amendment appear to be contradictory on the issue, and it has not been cleared up in my mind in the debate so far.

Although I believe that the UK Government needs to be more respectful of Scottish produce, I point out that food and drink bring many things to

the table besides economic benefits. Not only are food and drink key to our survival, but they are a cultural glue that binds us all together. Food and drink are vital to the health of the nation, and a well-nourished population would take the strain off the national health service. If it is managed properly, sharing out the many benefits of food and drink production across Scotland could stop rural depopulation.

The sector also has a major role to play in tackling the climate and nature emergencies, which is why the Scottish Greens have repeatedly called for multiyear funding that would help to deliver what is set out in the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022, implement a food production skills pipeline and support the transition to regenerative production methods.

I am incredibly proud that, as we have heard already, we have a thriving array of food and drink businesses and initiatives across Scotland. A couple of examples that I can think of are Grampian Graziers in Aberdeenshire and the Orkney Cheese Company, both of which do fantastic work to produce high-quality food while acknowledging the environment and animal welfare.

**Tim Eagle:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Ariane Burgess:** We have heard about the shortage of time, and I have quite a lot to say. I apologise.

I cannot, however, stand here today and say that all the primary food producers in my region fill me with pride. My region hosts the single biggest risk to the reputation of Scottish food and drink—fish farms. The UK and Scottish Governments are willing to support that industry with taxpayer money—£17 million since 2021, according to a report in the *Daily Record* today—and they do that no matter how much pollution the industry produces or how much ecological damage it causes, and despite the appalling animal suffering that it creates.

The industry’s arguments always boil down to the economic good that industrial-scale farming supposedly brings. The industry and the multinational corporations that run it do not have Scotland’s best interests at heart—they operate solely in the interests of their shareholders. When it comes to job creation, in my region only 253 full-time roles have been created over the past 35 years. Along with that, fish farms wreak environmental destruction that harms other marine sectors and our coastal communities.

Allowing fish farms to continue their business as usual is simply not an option. If we want Scottish exports to continue to be viewed as quality products that are produced to high environmental

and animal welfare standards, we need to act now to cut the high levels of pollution, sea lice and fish mortality that those farms produce. On mortality alone, no other farming sector would accept that level of loss, and neither should we. That is why I have been calling on the Government to introduce an immediate pause on fish-farm expansion, so that we can send a clear message to businesses, our export partners and the people of our nation that Scotland will not allow those who show complete disregard for our environment and communities to operate within our borders.

Fish farming is not the only threat to the wellbeing of Scotland's food and drink sector. Brexit has created labour shortages and reams of red tape. At the same time, the UK Government continues to cede control over food policy to the supermarkets—an approach that has already led to decades-long races to the bottom on price, quality and variety. That has left farmers operating on wafer-thin margins and has created a farcical situation that sees public subsidies being passed through farmers to private supermarket chains that turn over billions of pounds a year.

We have legislated for farmers to move to regenerative and sustainable agricultural systems, which are the very practices that will enable them to face the huge climate change challenges that we and they will face in the coming decades. Yet, with wafer-thin margins, it is no wonder that they are hesitant to move to those practices.

The UK Government also has much to answer for due to the trade deals that it has signed. The deals have not only undermined our nation's primary food producers, but have exported our carbon emissions to countries that produce food using methods that pay little heed to animal welfare or the environment.

With greater control over the direction of Scotland's food and drink policy, the Government and the Parliament could change the state of affairs and move to a system that would deliver not only for our environment and climate, but for the people of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We really do have no time in hand. Members will need to stick to their speaking allocations. I call Beatrice Wishart. You have up to six minutes.

15:15

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I welcome the opportunity to discuss and praise Scotland's iconic food and drink sector as we experience old and new threats. The Government's motion highlights the new risks posed by tariffs and, as Donald Trump embarks on new tariffs, we can already see the impact on global markets. Tariffs and barriers to trade serve

only to make people and countries poorer. Scotland's producers do not deserve or need the impact that tariffs bring, having already felt the disruption of Covid and Brexit.

Changes to freedom of movement have impacted workforce recruitment and retention, and recent Food and Drink Federation figures have highlighted a 34 per cent decline in overall food export volume to the EU. Although Scotch whisky remains a popular export to the bloc, we should be wary of the risks of the proposal for an English whisky geographical indication. New trade deals in the post-Brexit era bring concerns about lower welfare standards in food production, as is the case with products such as chlorinated chicken from the USA, and the new agreement with New Zealand has made lamb imports cheaper but it competes with the seasonal production of Scotch lamb.

At home, the cost of living crisis continues—household budgets are tight, and more and more people are being pushed towards using ultra-processed food, food banks and similar support. Early on in this parliamentary session, the Scottish Government's Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill was passed in order to improve access to food, sustainability in the sector and people's wellbeing. We are still waiting for the final good food nation plan, following consultation on the draft—perhaps the cabinet secretary could update us on that when she summates. We also face the twin emergencies of climate change and biodiversity loss, which could both have a massive impact on our food and drink sector. Fruit growers need the humble bee for pollination, and threats to honey bee populations from disease and parasites leave the sector vulnerable.

As others have said, salmon is Scotland's iconic fish. The salmon industry employs 2,500 people directly and around 10,000 people through the supply chain that reaches all parts of Scotland. I have heard directly from salmon farmers, including some who work in my own Shetland constituency, of their commitment to the welfare and husbandry of their fish. Salmon exports from the northern isles and other remote parts of Scotland contribute millions to the national economy, and the industry has significantly invested in modernisation and innovation. Recent UK Government trade statistics highlight that, in 2024, 100,000 tonnes of Scottish salmon worth £844 million was exported to 48 countries around the world.

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Beatrice Wishart:** Have I got time, Deputy Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No.

**Beatrice Wishart:** Sorry—I need to get through this. In Atlantic salmon production, Scotland ranks third globally and contributes 6 per cent of global production. It is a great success story, although salmon farming faces challenges such as rising sea temperatures and jellyfish blooms.

However, in my view, the biggest threat to salmon farming comes from those who are ideologically opposed to the sector itself. Those who would see an end to Scotland's salmon farming industry would cause devastation to rural and island economies, including in Shetland, where the industry employs around 400 people. It would ultimately lead to depopulation and would decimate some of Scotland's most fragile communities.

Fishing is culturally and economically important in many of Scotland's island and coastal communities. My members' business debate a few weeks ago—the first dedicated fisheries debate in the Scottish Parliament for years—highlighted the impact of spatial squeeze and displacement from traditional fishing grounds due to an increase in developments such as offshore renewables. We should embrace what we can catch around Scotland, as that is a low-carbon means of supplying a source of food that is high in protein while reducing food miles and ensuring food security.

Any reduction in Scotland's food production will have an impact on those who make it possible to get food to the table. Road hauliers play a vital role in Scotland's food and drink economy. They move goods, including perishables such as fresh seafood, across the country to meet onward connections to global markets. Those perishables need appropriate packaging, such as the boxes produced by Shetland firm Thulecraft that are used to ship salmon and mussels. More than 80 per cent of Scotland's mussels are grown in Shetland.

We should be doing what we can to support all those industries and producers as they face increasing costs and uncertainties, and we should support them to decarbonise and become more sustainable for the future.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. I point out again that time is tight.

15:20

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I very much welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. In due course, I will refer to some of the local food and drink industries in my constituency, which I am sure other members will do, too—if not, they ought to.

That said, I think that we, the Scottish public, perhaps underestimate the value in hard cash of exports and, indeed, the quality of our home-grown produce across this wide and varied sector—soft fruits, a large variety of tatties, neeps, seafood, cheeses, our craft beers and lagers and, of course, our whisky. By the way, I do not know what Sir Keir Starmer was thinking when he suggested changing the definition of a single malt just to help English distilleries. Indeed, was he thinking of Scotland at all? I have a feeling that, like Margaret Thatcher, whom he admires, he just does not get Scotland.

**Daniel Johnson:** It is because Keir Starmer prioritises whisky that he has prioritised a trade deal with India—whisky's biggest market—which currently has a 150 per cent tariff. Surely that shows the emphasis that he places on whisky, does it not?

**Christine Grahame:** No. I have a lot of time for Mr Johnson, but he is on very wobbly ground given the increase in employer national insurance contributions, which will hurt the whisky industry as much as any other.

Other moves that Keir Starmer has made—particularly, as I have referred to, the increase in employer national insurance contributions—will burden the many small food and drink producers across rural Scotland. They will find it hard, in competition with the big boys such as Tennent's, to push that cost on to their prices. As well as U-turning on whisky, Keir Starmer should reverse the increase in employer national insurance contributions. Indeed, it is a bit rich for Rhoda Grant to complain about the lack of rural employees when we have that tax on jobs, which is leading to some jobs being cut in small businesses. They are certainly not increasing—so much for building the economy.

**Rhoda Grant:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** [*Made a request to intervene.*]

**Christine Grahame:** I seem to have touched a raw nerve. I wonder why.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** From whom are you taking the intervention, Ms Grahame?

**Christine Grahame:** I am sorry—I thought that sitting down would be a sufficient indication. I am now sitting down.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Rhoda Grant, I think.

**Rhoda Grant:** Does Christine Grahame acknowledge that the NI threshold was cut for small businesses, which will have a positive impact on small rural businesses?

**Christine Grahame:** One has to ask oneself about all the other things that Labour did not mention in its election manifesto. It did not mention an increase in employer national insurance contributions, and that was on top of the decisions relating to the WASPI women—women against state pension inequality—the winter fuel allowance and now, of course, benefits. Labour has a lot to answer for, so, if I was a Labour member, I would keep quiet for the time being.

On top of that, we have Brexit—do not mention the B-word. There is hardly a cheep about that from Labour or the Tories. I wonder why. Could it be because it was never the open door to the world's markets, including the USA, but the bearer of increased regulations, red tape and costs? Just ask the Horticultural Trades Association. It has also led to undeniable shortages in the workforce. Just ask the soft fruit growers who watched their year's work turn to mush in the fields. Despite warm words before the general election from Dame Jackie Baillie, there has been no progress on a rural visa pilot scheme.

B is for Brexit and T is for tariffs, because we are now at the mercy of the human wrecking ball that is otherwise known as Donald Trump. Unlike political leaders, I do not need to be circumspect or ca' canny with my words. As he levies tariffs here, there and everywhere, he disrupts the world's economy to boot. That is another impact on our food and drink exports. By the way, there never was a special relationship—the dugs in the street know that.

The broad background is that, in 2020, the food and drink sector in Scotland generated turnover worth £15 billion and it comprised more than 17,000 small businesses employing about 129,000 people. Many of those businesses are in rural communities such as mine. I have time to mention just a couple of those, because I have been taking interventions that were really pretty worthless. Traquair House Brewery exports its beer and ales around the world. Broughton Ales has won awards from the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates, the Campaign for Real Ale, UK supermarkets such as Tesco, Meininger's international craft beer awards and the world beer awards. The Tempest Brewing Co, which was originally in a disused area in Kelso, is now in my patch in the Borders, and it has a very successful taproom at its brewery for people to sample its products. Stow brewery is in Lauder and it produces beers and gins.

Lest people think that it is all about alcohol in the Borders—although there is no problem with that—there is also Tweed Valley Venison, based in Peebles, which makes venison and game from the Tweed catchment area into burgers and sausages, and the fourth-generation retail and

wholesale butcher Shaws Fine Meats is in Lauder. Fifth-generation artisan bakery Alex Dalgetty and Sons is based next door to my office in Gala, and it has a second shop in Melrose. It is the producer of the famous Selkirk bannock, which I suggest is best warm with butter.

I have had to skip some, so I apologise for not being able to mention other food and drink retailers and wholesalers across the Borders—I am sure that you are relieved, Presiding Officer.

I say again to Rhoda Grant that I commend buying Scottish and I have breaking news: the Scottish National Party first ran a campaign to buy Scottish more 40 years ago. I know—I was outside the supermarkets, waving flags for it, and it led to supermarkets branding Scottish produce with a saltire. There are some benefits to being older.

15:26

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** Follow that, Presiding Officer. There is lots of lovely alcohol in the Borders, but we are not reliant on it.

Hooray for Scotland's food and drink sector, which contributes £15 billion to our economy and supports 120,000 jobs. It is just fantastic. From Scotch whisky to Scottish beef, our agriculture and hospitality industries, and all those in the supply chain, are at the heart of our economy.

Just last week, my colleague Finlay Carson and I had the pleasure of attending the Scottish Countryside Alliance awards, which are otherwise known as the rural Oscars.

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** I was there.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Jim Fairlie was there as well—[*Interruption.*]—and Emma Harper.

Those awards celebrated the outstanding businesses in our constituencies that keep rural communities thriving. I was delighted to see businesses representing my constituency—the Allanton Inn, the Gordon Arms, Andersen & Sondergaard and Scott's of Kelso—all of which are fantastic businesses that provide the very best of Scottish food and drink.

We must address the elephant in the room—the current policies of Labour and the SNP Government, which are making it harder to produce food and drink in Scotland. Economic mismanagement and neglect of rural Scotland are threatening the industries that are vital to our rural economy. When I speak to businesses in the sector, I hear that high energy costs are a huge problem, and that there is excessive bureaucracy at local government and Holyrood level. There is

also a deeply unfair business rates system that puts businesses under immense strain.

In addition to that, we have overregulation that is stifling innovation. The Government is about to have a round-table meeting on gene editing. I would love that to be a cross-party effort, if possible, because the Scottish Conservatives are 100 per cent behind that. We want our producers to be as competitive as others and not be disadvantaged. We want people to be able to compete on a level playing field with the rest of the UK and beyond, whether in Europe or globally.

At the same time, as has been highlighted today, we are seeing Labour decimating the future of Scottish farms. It cannot get away with it. It cannot defend its position on a cruel family farm tax that could threaten up to 75,000 farms across the UK, which would strip away the ability for farms to plan, to invest and to grow.

This weekend, I was with my father and my brother, who farm on the Welsh border. They are organic dairy farmers who have 350 cows and work 24 hours a day. They barely get time to eat in the day. It is a hard life. I felt quite moved by what my dad said. I should not really be saying this, but he said that he was not sure about the future of dairy.

Jim Fairlie said that dairy cow numbers have not declined, but we know that they declined between January 2024 and 2025. The reason they have declined is that it is so hard to farm these days, even without all the new policies that Labour is bringing in, from the national insurance contributions to the family farm tax. My father said that it was a hard summer for farmers last year. They finished the silage that they produced, because they needed to feed the cows for longer. They are now feeding them hard feed, but the price of hard feed has increased dramatically, so profitability is being driven out of agriculture.

What are we without farmers? We are nothing. I was very surprised by some of the things that the Green member Ariane Burgess said. We are talking about key components not only of our rural economy but of our economy as a whole. The things that farmers produce are essential, because people need to eat, and farmers are the suppliers.

I am really concerned about high-quality agricultural land being used for renewables, such as solar farms, to meet the net zero targets. That is absolutely not the way to go, because the overproliferation is having an impact. At the weekend, I met a broccoli grower, who told me that he would make more money putting grade 1 land over to solar panels. Admittedly that is in England, but the same thing is happening in the Borders, where there is an overproliferation of applications. We do not need that: we can supply

energy demands without using all the class 1, 2 and 3 land in Scotland.

The same applies to fishermen in relation to the spatial squeeze. Earlier, I spoke to Elspeth Macdonald from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. We know that the spatial squeeze is having a massive impact on fishing, as are the rapid expansion of offshore wind projects, marine conservation measures and restrictive regulations. We know that because, when the SNP was in collaboration with the Greens under the Bute house agreement, it tried to shut off 50 per cent of Scottish seas, and it made a rapid U-turn.

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has warned that the industry risks being "crushed"—that is the word that it used—by the sheer scale of planned developments in Scottish waters. Instead of working with the industry to strike a fair balance, the SNP seems intent on making life even harder for our fishermen.

Scotland's food and drink sector is the backbone of our economy, and both Labour and the SNP must rethink their horrendous and damaging policies.

15:32

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I am really pleased to speak in the debate and to focus, in particular, on Scotland's world-class seafood, which is not just a product that we sell; it is part of who we on the coast are. For generations, our coastal communities have been built around the fishing industry, with ports such as Peterhead and Fraserburgh landing some of the finest seafood in the world. It is not just delicious; it is a sustainable, low-carbon source of protein that is rich in omega 3 and vitamins, which are essential for a healthy diet. It is something that we should be immensely proud of.

With 70 to 80 per cent of our seafood being exported, our produce is recognised worldwide for its quality, and our shellfish and white fish are sought after in some of the finest restaurants in Europe, Asia and the middle east. Industry leaders such as Jimmy Buchan of the Amity Fish Company are taking our seafood to new markets, and they recently showcased Scotland's produce in Dubai. At the Gulfood trade show, the largest food expo in the world, Scottish companies secured more than £1.5 million in new business, thereby proving that there is huge demand for our seafood. Every new restaurant in Paris or Dubai that serves Scottish seafood strengthens our industry back home.

The industry contributes billions of pounds to our economy and supports thousands of jobs in fishing, processing and logistics. Strengthening the sector means ensuring stable livelihoods for

coastal communities that have relied on the sea for generations. Scottish seafood is not just in demand in high-end restaurants abroad; it is also making its way into major retailers and emerging markets. That diversification helps to shield our industry from economic uncertainty and trade disruptions. Expanding our global reach helps to ensure long-term sustainability, but it also means that we must push for more support from the UK Government and work closely with producers to remove unnecessary barriers and provide the right support to maximise opportunities worldwide.

That international reputation is built on hard work and innovation. However, to keep it growing, we need to make sure that our seafood industry gets the support that it needs. That means supporting exporters and making it easier to get Scottish seafood on to plates around the world. It means making sure that our ports, markets—

**Tim Eagle:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Karen Adam:** Yes, I will.

**Tim Eagle:** The industry was fairly upset a couple of weeks ago, when it found out that one of John Swinney's special advisers had said that the spatial squeeze in the North Sea is not a thing. Do you agree that that statement is unfair, given that fishermen across the north-east are very concerned about the wind farm developments in the North Sea?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I again remind members to speak through the chair.

**Karen Adam:** I had not heard of that comment, but I am happy to discuss it. When I was first elected to the Parliament, I noted that there was a space that needed filling for fishers and the offshore wind industry to come together to have discussions on the blue economy. That is why I set up the cross-party group on fisheries and coastal communities, which I convene.

Crucially, building that international reputation means investing in the next generation of fishers, so that our industry continues to thrive for years to come.

Although our seafood is a huge success internationally, we should also be eating more of it ourselves. Fish is one of the healthiest, most sustainable and tastiest foods that we have access to, yet many Scots do not eat the recommended amount, which is two portions a week—in case anyone needs to know that. Part of the solution is to make sure that people can access and afford Scottish seafood. It is a strange reality that, in a country surrounded by the sea, we do not eat as much of it as we should.

We need to make sure that we are holding retailers to account so that they properly support

and promote our world-class produce. Supermarkets play a huge role in that; they decide what is visible on the shelves, what is promoted and what is priced competitively. Right now, 37 per cent of supermarket promotions are for unhealthy, high-fat, high-sugar products, while fresh produce—including fish—is far less visible. That has to change.

When Lidl and Aldi invested in marketing Scottish seafood, they saw higher sales and increased market share, thereby proving that when local produce is given prominence, people will buy it, so let us get all the major supermarkets on board to stock and label Scottish fish prominently and to run special offers on it, just as they do with imported produce. We must make sure that our local food is properly supported by Scotland's biggest food retailers.

The issue is not simply about what is in our shops; it is also about ensuring that our young people are taught about this wonderful food source. The seafood in schools programme has been brilliant in introducing young people to the benefits of Scottish seafood and showing them where their food comes from.

If we want our seafood sector to continue to thrive, we need to support it in any way possible. Investing in our seafood infrastructure and upgrading ports, markets and processing facilities will keep our sector strong, as will tackling workforce shortages. We should encourage more Scots to eat Scottish seafood by launching public information campaigns and working with supermarkets to make our produce affordable and visible.

By doing that, we can send a clear message that we believe in Scotland's seafood and are committed to it, both at home and abroad. Scotland's seas are rich, but let us make sure that we not only celebrate but sustain what they offer.

15:38

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I remind members of my voluntary register of trade union interests. I will start with those interests because, before being elected to the Parliament, I spent two decades representing workers in Scotland's food and drink industry: the brewers of Duke Street, the night shift at Carriden Brae, the coopers at Muirhall, the cleaners at Carsebridge, the milk crumb processors in Girvan and the bottling hall operatives on the Great Western Road. It was a privilege to represent them all.

They formed an important part of my education, forged the bonds of lifelong friendships and, every single day, gave me a lesson in precisely why we need an industrial strategy, a planned economy and a fundamental and irreversible shift in the



balance of power in the workplace and in the wider economy. We went through a lot together, sharing hope, facing setbacks, organising a movement and broadening the horizons of a class.

They combined to fight for a living wage. They took decisive action, not just to defend their standard of living but in pursuit of a better quality of life. They fought, all too often with their backs against the wall, for jobs and for security of employment. They championed the cause of justice and a fairer share-out of the wealth—the wealth that they were creating. In doing so, we won victories over privilege and overcame inequalities. So, as I stood with them then, I stand with them today in this Parliament, just as I also stand with those seasonal migrant workers soon to arrive in rural Scotland in their battles for decent pay, decent accommodation and dignity at work.

I keep my faith that the day must come when trade unions will not just be a line of defence but an alternative line of advance—a means through which workers can participate in the running of the industry that they work in, releasing their enterprise, their energy and their initiative. I do not underestimate how far removed from that we are today, not least in industries such as food and drink, which, more and more, is run by absentee owners in faraway boardrooms and according to the portfolio interests of the global asset managers.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the production of whisky, where, with a couple of notable exceptions, the Scotch whisky industry is no longer owned and controlled in Scotland, but in Paris, Bermuda, the Philippines, Japan, New York and Thailand and in the boardrooms of Great Marlborough Street and the stock exchange. Ownership is power; it matters, not least because 20 per cent of all Scotland's international export earnings come from food and drink. It is ranked as our biggest export earner, and 80 per cent of that comes from the export of whisky and other spirits. Parliament's message to the Government in today's debate must be that if we want the sector to thrive, we need to diversify as well as grow.

We need to diversify because, across the wider economy, we know that just 10 businesses account for almost a quarter of Scotland's international exports, that just 20 account for almost a third and that just 60 businesses in Scotland generate half of all our export earnings.

That makes us vulnerable any time, but at a time when the White House is threatening tariffs and trade wars, it makes us even more vulnerable now, so we need better support for producers to export, a workforce plan, more investment by the banks and our pension funds directly in industry, and more support for indigenous business growth. When I hear of additional public investment being

found for defence, such as the £2 billion increase to UK export finance announced by the chancellor on Friday for arms sales, at the same time as £5 billion is being cut from support for sick and disabled people, I do not rejoice; I despair.

The industrial strategy that I want is both serious and grown up, but it does not depend on the freeport, the weapons manufacturer, the arms trade and the nuclear menace. Rather, it depends on the development, diversification and democratisation of industries such as food and drink. We should be increasing export finance direct lending capacity to support them and their growth.

Finally, last month, the cabinet secretary told Parliament:

“Since 2014, we have provided more than £7 million towards the Scotland food and drink export plan”.—[*Official Report*, 19 February 2025; c 10.]

She must know that that represents just a drop in the ocean. Both Scotland's Governments, the enterprise agencies and the Scottish National Investment Bank should be supporting the sector to grow.

My job in Parliament, as it was before I came to Parliament, is not just to contest existing conditions but to open up the possibility of an alternative. I will keep saying what I believe in. It is a socialist outlook that is based on experience, not simple ideology, and it is founded on that shared hope that I spoke of—that a wider transformation of society is not just possible; it is socially, economically, environmentally and morally irrefutable.

15:44

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** In the chamber last week, I raised my concerns about the risks of the proposal for an English whisky geographical indication, and I asked how the Government is protecting the value of provenance in the Scottish food and drink industry. I welcomed the cabinet secretary's reassurance that this Scottish Government is absolutely committed to supporting the sector and its incredible products. The sector, which is worth an incredible £15 billion, is one of the most successful sectors in Scotland, and food and drink are our biggest non-energy exports.

Scotland's produce is renowned for its quality and its clear provenance, and the sector is driven forward by the resilience and innovation of our producers and wholesalers. We often talk about the industry's importance to rural and island communities—indeed, many of my colleagues have mentioned that in this debate—but it reaches into every community in Scotland, including more urban areas such as my Rutherglen constituency.

Dunns Food & Drinks in Blantyre, which is a multi-award-winning wholesale supplier and one of Scotland's most historic family businesses, is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. In 1875, Joseph Dunn established a soft drinks business in the east end of Glasgow at a time when increasingly popular aerated waters were sold from horse-pulled carts. Dunns continued to expand throughout the 20th century, moving to Cambuslang in 1995 and then to Blantyre, where it remains. Today, Dunns Food & Drinks is a fourth-generation company with Joseph Dunn's great-granddaughter, Julie Dunn, at the helm. It has a remarkably wide portfolio of high-quality products, which it delivers largely to the Scottish hospitality trade.

Dunns retains its connection to the soft drinks industry via its Currie's brand—the home of many long-time family favourites. I am sure that my Ayrshire colleagues will be as interested as I was to learn that its red kola recipe remains largely the same after 100 years. The product has a particularly committed following in and around Ayrshire, where the company sells more than 5 million bottles a year.

Spiceway in Rutherglen is another independent, family-run food and drinks wholesale business in my constituency, and it has gone from strength to strength. Having started 22 years ago with a single vehicle and a 5,000 square foot warehouse, it now has facilities that spread over 40,000 square feet and a fleet of vehicles, and it supplies retailers, manufacturers, hotels, restaurants, takeaways and events across the country.

The Scottish wholesale sector provides a vital service, ensuring that our food and drink supply chain runs smoothly and supporting retail and hospitality businesses. The sector is undoubtedly crucial to the success of many food and drink businesses. To put it simply, our producers make their world-class products, retailers and service providers make them available to the public, and wholesalers are the crucial conduit. They have an important role to play in the growth of Scotland's economy and the promotion of the Scottish food and drink industry.

In recognition of that, I am delighted that the Scottish Government has developed a strong collaborative partnership with the Scottish Wholesale Association and provides it with funding to help it to support our Scottish wholesalers and producers to increase the volume of local produce that is sold.

On the subject of the links between local produce and the wholesale industry, PK Foods, which is also based in Rutherglen, supplies Indian starters and snacks to more than 90 per cent of Scotland's wholesale sector and counts many major chains among its retail customers. That

company, which is another family business, has been in operation since 1997 and it prides itself on keeping its entire operation in house, from recipe development and the cooking of products from scratch right through to packing and delivery. It estimates that it produces around 10 tonnes of pakoras a week, so it is safe to say that, if anyone in the chamber has eaten pakoras recently, there is a very high chance that they were made in Rutherglen.

In recent years, all parts of the food and drink sector have shown much resilience in responding to the many challenges that they have faced. However, clear areas of concern remain, including the economic strain that has been caused by Brexit, inflationary pressures, increasing energy costs and wider geopolitical disruptions and threats. Using Brexit as just one example, I note that Scotland did not vote for that decision, but we have been left paying the price. UK households have paid £7 billion to cover the cost of post-Brexit trade barriers on food imports from the EU. That has pushed average household food costs up by £250 since the end of 2019. In addition, many Scottish suppliers are suffering from lower volumes of exports to the EU and significant and immediate gaps in labour.

The Scottish Government has taken every opportunity to engage with the UK Government and press it on the impact of Brexit and the UK's immigration policies on Scotland's food and drink sector. We have heard about some of that today.

During the general election campaign, we were told that Labour was open to talks about mitigating labour shortages to help businesses to reach their full potential. However, nothing has happened. Instead, the new UK Labour Government has chosen to hammer Scottish businesses via their national insurance contributions—a tax on jobs; has entertained the idea of redefining single malt whisky, to the detriment of the Scottish industry; and makes no argument to reverse Brexit, despite the fact one of its ministers has stated that 60 per cent of the impact of that is yet to materialise.

The best future for the Scottish economy hinges on Scotland being an independent member of the EU. In the meantime, I am confident that the Scottish Government will continue to do all that it can to support the Scottish food and drink sector and its incredible products.

15:51

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** Scotland's £15 billion food and drink sector is globally renowned and respected. However, it is also neglected and, sometimes, made the scapegoat—including by its Government. The sector provides billions to the UK economy. Scotch whisky alone

contributes £7 billion; the vast majority of that sum is generated here in Scotland.

Our drinks industry is not only important to the Scottish economy in terms of income, jobs and exports; it is a highly productive sector. It is entrepreneurial. It comprises large, global multinational brands and smaller businesses such as Winton Brewery and Broughton Ales in the South of Scotland region, which I represent. It is also a key driver in other sectors, such as tourism, culture and advertising. We have only to look at the Edinburgh Gin distillery, a new visitor attraction at the Arches, just a few yards from the entrance to the Parliament, to see that.

At the last count, Scotland had 100 breweries and more than 4,340 pubs, employing 65,000 people and contributing £1.8 billion in wider economic benefits. Across Scotland, breweries and distilleries employ locally and are committed to sourcing locally wherever possible. They work with hundreds of small and medium-sized enterprises across Scotland.

However, despite the powerful contribution that the sector makes to the economy and to those who work within it, it still faces risks at home and abroad. The Scotch Whisky Association has said that 2024 was a “challenging year”. There was a 14 per cent increase in the tax on every bottle of Scotch whisky. Inflation had an impact on the costs of inputs such as cereals, energy and shipping. There is the risk of a redesignation of Scotch in England. In addition, the threat of tariffs now looms large.

In Scotland, our drinks industry has been forced to grapple with a number of ill-thought-out SNP policies, such as the botched deposit return scheme, minimum unit pricing, the threat of restrictions on marketing and sponsorship—which had been withdrawn but is now back on the table—and the impact of the SNP’s failure to pass on rates relief to the Scottish hospitality sector.

We need a concerted effort to fend off those threats, including action by the UK Government to promote strong and open trade relations with key export markets, including the US. That also means John Swinney biting his tongue, following a series of cack-handed interventions in UK-US security and trade discussions.

Ministers must also choose very carefully their language on the Scottish alcohol industry more generally. Last year, the cross-party group on beer and pubs—which, for the record, I chair—recommended that the Scottish Government should rethink its

“curiously outdated and unbalanced attitude”

to the sector. We called on ministers to recognise that huge economic and social potential is waiting

to be unlocked in the sector, but that that will only happen if the mood music is carefully chosen. Our report called on ministers to develop

“a coherent hospitality strategy ... to align with the objectives of Brand Scotland”.

We need to give the sector a chance to thrive. The Parliament and the Government need to deliver a period of regulatory calm and measures that incentivise investment. Brand Scotland aims to make Scotland a place that is recognised as a highly desirable country to live in, work in, study in, visit, trade with and invest in. However, ministers need to be clearer about the role of key industries such as Scotch whisky, craft gin and brewing.

Sadly, Scotland’s pubs are closing at a faster rate than elsewhere in the UK, and investment is being diverted because lack of certainty makes it difficult to plan ahead. We need urgent action on a number of other fronts, including the obstructive planning process and the employment challenges—including those created by Labour’s national insurance increase—that are a barrier to growth.

I hate to say it, but the SNP must also address the creeping anti-alcohol agenda that is being actively pursued by this SNP Government. In fact, a senior executive from one of the largest global drinks producers told me that, in all the countries in which his firm operates, he has never seen a Government that did so little to champion or defend its national drinks industry. That lack of support for the sector is also evident elsewhere. Scotland’s pubs, as I said, are not receiving that lifeline business rate relief, which is an injustice, and which will continue into next year.

As our amendment makes clear, the industry has worked hard to address the harms of alcohol misuse through a range of local initiatives such as Best Bar None, as well as supporting the work of Drinkaware and the Portman Group. However, we also need action to support Scottish products and to make more local beers available. An opportunity will be created next month when the Scottish pubs code will enable tied pubs to sell one guest beer from a small independent brewer.

As the sector looks forward, we also need to ensure that the operating environment is conducive to attracting people to work in it. We all know that the beer and pub sector offers excellent employment opportunities, but we urgently need a more positive dialogue about the unique community value of the sector, the range of careers that are on offer, and the transferability of the skills in the sector.

Ministers also need to look at the employment situation in rural communities, where a lack of affordable housing and the shortage of public transport can cause specific problems. The 65,000

jobs that are provided by our breweries and pubs stretch from the Borders to the Outer Isles and from city centres to Scotland's remote glens. That is the contribution of the sector across Scotland, and we should be rightly proud of it.

Scotland's food and drink sector could, and should, have a bright future. However, to deliver that, the Government must heed the warnings that have been made. We all recognise the economic and social contribution of the sector, but to ensure that that continues, ministers must be willing to stand up and fully support it.

15:57

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the motion from the cabinet secretary, and the opportunity to highlight how the south of Scotland is in the premier league when it comes to food and drink in Scotland and the world. The south of Scotland has some of the best produce in the world, which is prepared by some of the best chefs and kitchen staff into some of the finest food and drink in the world.

I have spoken about many of the wonderful producers and restaurants in previous debates in the chamber. We also make whisky in the south of Scotland: at Bladnoch distillery near Wigtown, Annandale distillery at Annan, and the Borders distillery at Hawick, and now also at the Crafty distillery at Newton Stewart and, of course, Moffat distillery. They all produce some very fine whiskies, with an increasingly positive global reputation.

However, that reputation was—and maybe still is—in danger of being harmed through the unfathomable actions of the UK Government recently, with its proposals to create a geographical indication for English whisky and slip in changes to the malt whisky definition through the back door. The Scotch Whisky Association has slammed that proposal—thank goodness that it was spotted and called out. Single malt means product from one distillery, both mashing and distillation—not just mashing it anywhere and then bringing it in and distilling it in one place.

Just last week, we saw a slew of nominations for south of Scotland agribusinesses at the Scottish Countryside Alliance awards. Rachael Hamilton mentioned some of them already, such as Scott's of Kelso. I will add: Five Kingdoms Brewery from the Isle of Whithorn, the Ship Inn at Drummore, and the Selkirk Arms Hotel in Kirkcudbright, among others. They were all nominated for awards.

I also could not miss the opportunity to plug the Stranraer oyster festival, which will take place this September. It was first held in 2017 and now attracts more than 20,000 visitors every year. It is

a huge boon to the local economy, and a tribute to the hard work of the Stranraer Development Trust and its partners in developing such a successful event. I know that the cabinet secretary is familiar with oysters and the oyster festival and has visited it on a number of occasions. The oyster festival shows the kind of innovation that takes place in our food and drink sector across the south, with support from the Scottish Government and South of Scotland Enterprise and other agencies.

I acknowledge the work of Richard Lochhead, in shaping the Government's direction towards promoting the high end of the food and drink markets. During his tenure as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment, he saw the huge potential in ensuring that Scotland's leading rural food and drink sector was recognised globally for its quality. A decade on, those efforts are now being led by the current cabinet secretary, who is sitting in front of me. I am pleased that it is demonstrably clear that Scotland's food and drink sector is a global leader.

However, it is not only at the high-rolling end of the market that the south of Scotland is doing well.

**Craig Hoy:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Emma Harper:** I do not think that I have time. I normally take interventions, but the time remaining is short and I want to cover the many notes that I made during other members' speeches.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Arla Foods gave a massive vote of confidence to the Dumfriesshire economy, with the news that it will create up to 90 jobs at its Lockerbie dairy processing facility as it expands for the future. Dumfries and Galloway is the core of Scotland's dairy industry. As the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity told me at portfolio question time the other week, the Scottish Government is helping to support Arla's continued success.

The events in Ukraine over the past three years have shown the perils of our relying so heavily on food imports. Before the war, 50 per cent of world sunflower oil production happened in Ukraine, and 18 per cent of barley and 12 per cent of wheat came from Ukraine. The Russian invasion has meant that prices for those basic foodstuffs have shot through the roof and at times obtaining supplies has been precarious. Food security is absolutely a concern, so it is good to hear the cabinet secretary mention that. We need a strong and vibrant food and drink sector domestically, not only because it supports tens of thousands of rural jobs but because it reduces our reliance on overseas imports that, as we have seen, can stop or slow down at the whim of a dictator such as President Putin.

We have a booming food and drink sector in Scotland, despite the weight of Brexit hanging around the necks of the whole industry. Members should be clear that restored membership of the EU and the customs union, in line with the express will of the people of Scotland, is, in both the short and the long term, in the best interests of our economy. It is to the shame of the main parties at Westminster that they are simply not interested in carrying out the will of the people of Scotland.

Those who campaigned to tear Scotland out of the EU should apologise to every farmer, every agriculture business and every food and drink producer in the land for the increased costs and the red tape that their disastrous kamikaze Brexit has imposed. As President Trump rampages across international trade and tariff policies, the UK is now uniquely exposed to his irrational wrath, unlike the EU, which is able to work collectively to protect its food production agri-industries.

It is a tribute to the tenacity, ingenuity and hard work of those food and drink businesses that they are maintaining their high quality, but we all know that Brexit has prevented them from being able to go that extra mile and ramp things up to the next level. I am grateful that we have a Scottish Government that has done its level best, within the straitjacket of Westminster diktat, to minimise the harms that Brexit has caused and to stand up for the food and drink industry in Scotland and especially in the south of our country.

16:03

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I appreciate that the cabinet secretary is not going anywhere soon, but I was sorry to read about her decision to step down at the next election. I served as a local councillor for the same period as the cabinet secretary, and we were elected to the Scottish Parliament at the same time. Mairi Gougeon has gone on to be our cabinet secretary, and I have gone on to be the person who asks her questions. I hope that, at the least, I have done so in a courteous and constructive manner.

I hope that one of the cabinet secretary's legacies will be the creation of a Galloway national park—a national park that is made in Galloway, for its people. I hope that the park will protect and improve our outstanding natural environment but, crucially, also grow our local economy by supporting sectors such as our food and drink providers. Such a balance can be achieved, which I hope will be the conclusion that NatureScot and the cabinet secretary come to.

As we have heard in the debate, our food and drink sector is a national success story. From our world-renowned whisky and seafood to our growing artisan food businesses, the sector is vital

not only for our economy but for our culture, our communities and our international reputation through brand Scotland. The sector generates a turnover of £16 billion and is responsible for £7 billion in exports—more than 30 per cent of the UK's total—and employs more than 129,000 people. Crucially, given that 97 per cent of such businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises, many of those jobs are created in economically fragile rural communities. It is a sector that reaches and benefits parts of Scotland that others cannot and do not reach. I see that week in and week out in my South Scotland region, as I visit local producers and processors, agricultural shows, country fairs, local farms, markets, fishing ports, hotels, and a distillery or brewery or two—or maybe three or four.

It is a genuine delight to be able to eat and drink my way across my region on a regular basis—maybe a bit too regularly. I thank those in the food and drink sector across Scotland—our farmers, our fishers, our shop workers, processors, wholesalers, and deliverers—who have delivered that success story.

However, I know from that journey—

**Craig Hoy:** Will the member give way?

**Colin Smyth:** I do not think that I have got any additional time—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** There is no additional time. It is up to the member whether he wishes to subsume the intervention.

**Colin Smyth:** I would like to do so but I have a few issues that I want to highlight, so I will continue.

I know from engaging with businesses in that journey across my region that there is no shortage of issues being raised, and many of those issues sit with this Parliament and with the Scottish Government. A week rarely passes when I do not speak to a business that is struggling to recruit skilled workers. People at one major hotel that I visited in the Scottish Borders told me that the hotel was not running at capacity, not because of a lack of demand but because of a lack of skilled staff—and those were well-paid, highly skilled posts that remained unfilled. No wonder Borders College and others have criticised the decision to axe the flexible workforce development fund and other support to get more skilled workers into the workplace. Our producers, our farmers, and our manufacturers need that steady pipeline of newly qualified, skilled workers. The Food and Drink Federation estimates that the sector needs nearly 35,000 new recruits by 2031 to fill skills gaps. Government agencies need to work—

**Finlay Carson:** Will the member give way?

**Colin Smyth:** I do not think that I have enough time to do that and to get through everything that I need to get through.

Government agencies need to work more closely with schools, colleges, and universities to develop the right training programmes that align with industry needs, with more investment in apprenticeships and a renewed focus on food and drink careers.

Unless we address the chronic housing shortage, especially in rural areas, I will continue to meet businesses such as the ones that I met in Dumfries and Galloway that told me that, even when they find staff who want to take up posts, the appointments often fall through because there is no affordable housing nearby.

I have also met businesses that are global leaders in sustainable food and drink production—focusing, for example, on carbon capture—particularly businesses in the whisky industry. We need to support such industries in the transition to net zero by offering targeted financial incentives for adopting greener technologies, improving energy efficiency, and reducing food waste.

Our farming and fishing industries also need a longer-term strategy—one that balances economic growth with our environmental responsibilities. Without proper stewardship, our marine biodiversity and coastal economies will suffer. It is time to set out a robust plan for sustainable fisheries that protects our waters and the livelihoods of those that depend on them.

The good food nation plan should be at the heart of that, ensuring sustainability and food security for future generations. Unfortunately, the current draft plan lacks the ambition that is necessary to achieve that. For example, that plan should set out how we will embed farming, fishing, and food production at every level of education and place a stronger emphasis on procuring and promoting local food and drink.

The Scottish Government, local authorities, and public bodies spend £16 billion annually on goods and services, including food. However, for too long, public procurement has prioritised cost over sustainability. We should consider, for example, clear targets for increasing the percentage of locally sourced, sustainable, nutritious food that is bought by the public sector. Supporting local supply chains not only boosts businesses but reduces our carbon footprint and helps to tackle food insecurity.

Food and drink are not just economic assets; they impact public health, the environment, and standards of animal welfare. However, for too long, too many people in Scotland have lacked access to nutritious food, exposing deep inequalities. That is why the decision not to embed

the right to food in the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 was deeply disappointing. It was a missed opportunity. The SNP and Greens assured us that it would be addressed in a forthcoming human rights bill, but whatever happened to that?

Our food and drink sector has the potential to grow further, creating more jobs, boosting our economy, and strengthening Scotland's global standing, but that will not happen without the right support.

16:09

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** I wish the cabinet secretary well for the remainder of her time in Parliament and beyond.

The debate has been interesting so far. It is obvious to me that it is only with independence that we can do a lot more with regard to Scotland's food and drink. The Tory whisky duty hikes when that party was last in power reduced tax revenue by £300 million, and Labour's national insurance hike is threatening jobs, so it is clear that we could do so much more if we were an independent country.

**Craig Hoy:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Stuart McMillan:** I am sorry, Mr Hoy—I normally take interventions, but not today.

I agree with Clare Haughey's comments—I see that she is leaving the chamber just as I am going to praise her. As she said, it is not just rural and island communities, but ordinary communities, too, that have a huge amount to offer when it comes to food and drink in Scotland.

I wanted to speak in the debate because it reminded me of a debate that took place in 2018, in which I also spoke. I spoke then about the importance of the food and drink industry not only to Scotland, but to my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency in particular. At that time, I gave a special mention to the New Chocolate Company, which was based in Port Glasgow—in fact, the company delivered some chocolate to MSPs' offices after the debate. Sadly, I cannot do the same today—that is the only negative point that I will mention. Sadly, the couple who ran the business have retired and the place is now no longer operational, but I genuinely wish them very well in their retirement, because they provided an absolutely outstanding product.

Port Glasgow now has a company called Downriver Coffee Roasters. It was set up by Ryan, who is originally from New York but came to Scotland in 2015 to study. Ryan and her wife moved to Inverclyde during the pandemic, and soon after, she began pursuing a career in coffee

roasting. Despite Downriver being a young business, Ryan has put her mark on the local economy—she is supplying local hospitality businesses as well as customers outside the constituency. Ryan’s business acumen and commitment to sustainably sourced coffee saw Downriver win the entrepreneurialism award last year and be nominated for the sustainability category at the Inverclyde Chamber of Commerce icon awards.

In 2018, I touched on the multi-award-winning McCaskie’s butcher, based in Wemyss Bay. McCaskie’s is now in its third generation of family ownership under Nigel Ovens, and it is considered to be Scotland’s most award-winning butcher, which is testament to its outstanding products. In that debate, I also mentioned the Golden Casket Group, which is considered to be one of the largest and most innovative confectionery specialists in the UK. It is based in Greenock and produces delicious products, from Buchanan’s toffees and chocolates, Millions, All Rounders, Hawick Balls, Gibb products and many others, which are sold far and wide. Once again, the business is family owned—it is now in its third generation of ownership, and it is extremely important for the local economy.

However, it is not just the businesses themselves that contribute to Inverclyde’s growing food and sector. Kempock Street in Gourrock, for example, has seen a growth in footfall, which has given a huge boost to hospitality, and the bimonthly Gourrock farmers market is certainly worthwhile visiting, too.

In Greenock, West Blackhall Street has recently undergone investment to try to recreate some of the success that has taken place in Gourrock. It reopened only earlier this year, and there remains some scepticism as to whether that will deliver more footfall; however, the street has attracted new businesses in recent years. We have Bird Chicken Shop, which has halal, vegan and gluten-free offerings. We also have the Alchemist, which is a new coffee shop that offers sandwiches from bakers and other local stores, helping the local economy. That includes Tonino’s foccacia breads, which really are out of this world—Tonino’s is another multi-award-winning facility in the constituency.

We also have a business called 17Ngon, set up by Ben Egan, who travelled to Japan to train. He did not come from Inverclyde, but he chose to come to Inverclyde to set up his business. All of his produce is manufactured in the restaurant, and it is all made from raw materials. He makes everything himself and brings very little in. Ben has travelled the world to bring in some of the best flavours and combinations. His menu changes every few weeks, but it is normally focused on

specific cuisines such as Japanese, Taiwanese and Vietnamese cooking.

Greenock also has a 120-year-old family baker, Aulds, which is—again—multi-award winning and supplies delicious products to the community and beyond. That family baker is vital to our local economy and creates many hundreds of jobs.

I will touch on two aspects with regard to drink. The first is the award-winning Titan rum. Three guys liked rum. They had a hobby and decided to make rum to sell. Titan Spirits is based in Greenock and Titan rum is stocked in the Scottish Parliament bar, if anyone finds that of interest. It has won multiple awards.

On 20 June this year, the Ardgowan distillery in Inverkip will open. In 2018, I stated:

“Inverkip will join the whisky trail soon when the Ardgowan distillery is built.” —[*Official Report*, 13 September 2018; c 77.]

That was seven years ago, and it will be a real pleasure to see that whisky distillery open. I have engaged with the distillery a great deal over the years, particularly with the chief executive officer, Martin McAdam, and the major shareholder, Roland Grain. I cannot wait for that to open, because it certainly will put Inverkip and Inverclyde on the whisky map, and that can only be a good thing for the community.

16:15

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate. It has been interesting to hear about many of the local suppliers, from across the constituencies and regions, that members use and support.

It has got me thinking that a lot of those suppliers start off very small—they build a nucleus and have to get known. Part of the process for becoming known in the local community is getting publicity, and some of that is done through our local press. The former editor of *The Northern Scot*, Chris Saunderson, is with us in the gallery today. It is important that we recognise that sometimes it is our local papers that promote those businesses to a wider audience, so that they can go on and grow even more. I wanted to get that on the record.

I will focus a lot of my remarks today on the GI status of Scotch single malt whisky and the application for an English single malt. We are being invited by the Labour Party to congratulate it and applaud the shameful UK Labour Government for something that it has not actually done. Rhoda Grant is already shaking her head. She would not give way to me, but I will give way to Rhoda Grant if she can answer this point. In her amendment, and in Daniel Johnson’s intervention on the

cabinet secretary earlier, they were telling us “Relax—everything is fine”. Indeed, Daniel Johnson told us that, because a Labour minister has said something, it will be true. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure that I believe that, because it was Labour politicians who told us that they would not change inheritance tax for farmers. How did that go?

I have a point for Rhoda Grant, as she gets ready to intervene. I was going to put it to her earlier, but she refused a number of times to take my intervention. On one hand, the Labour Party here in Holyrood is telling us, “Don’t worry—the situation has been resolved”, but on the other hand, I received, just last week, a letter from Daniel Zeichner, the Minister of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the UK Labour Government, on the application for English whisky to have GI status as single malt. He says that DEFRA

“is satisfied that it meets the requirements of the relevant legislation.”

He goes on to say:

“It is important to note that the proposed single malt definition in”

the English Whisky Guild’s

“GI application aligns with all relevant UK legislation.”

How does that comment, in black and white from a UK Government minister representing the Labour Party, align with what the Scottish—

**Daniel Johnson** *rose*—

**Douglas Ross:** I will give way to Rhoda Grant, because she is seeking to intervene.

How does that align with Scottish Labour telling us in its amendment that everything is fine and there is nothing to worry about? *[Interruption.]* I will give way to Rhoda Grant.

**Rhoda Grant:** I did not ask to intervene. However, I have to say that the member may stand up in the Parliament and say things that are maybe not true. *[Interruption.]* However, what was said in the UK Parliament, I have to say, is true, and he has to accept it.

**Douglas Ross:** That is quite a revelation. Rhoda Grant says that Daniel Zeichner MP, Minister of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—I am holding up the letter to show the letterhead of that UK Government department—has said something that is, apparently, not true. I am only reading out what UK Labour politicians are telling us. If that is not true, Rhoda Grant should go back to her UK Government and tell it not to write letters of clarification, because apparently they are wrong. If Rhoda Grant wants to intervene again, I will give way.

**Rhoda Grant:** The letter talks about legal competence. What the minister said on his hind legs in the UK Parliament was that they were not going to change a definition.

**Douglas Ross:** The letter makes it very clear—I will read it again—that DEFRA is

“satisfied that”

the application

“meets the requirements of the relevant legislation.”

It goes on to say that

“It is important to note that the proposed single malt definition in the EWG”—

that is, the English Whisky Guild—

“GI application aligns with all relevant UK legislation.”

I am sorry, but Scottish Labour members cannot come to the chamber today and ask to be congratulated on solving the problem when the problem still exists.

It is incumbent on members of the Scottish Parliament to stand up for the Scotch whisky industry. In fact, the industry itself has come up with a pragmatic solution, which I also want to get on the record. The industry is clear that, if “English single malt whisky” is defined, it would be possible for it to be produced at multiple locations and in different areas. The “single malt” definition is so important to Scotch whisky that all of us in the chamber should be doing our utmost to protect it, rather than Labour MSPs coming here simply to protect their Government.

In my final few seconds, I want to say that, although we are right to celebrate our produce in the chamber today, there will be no Scots produce from our farmers if there are no farms left. It is important to re-emphasise the “No Farmers, No Food” campaign. I agreed with what the cabinet secretary said about food security: I now think that food security is as important as energy security, here in Scotland and across the UK. Although debates on it have not been as numerous in recent weeks and months as they were, protests continue at Westminster against the UK Labour Government and its plans for inheritance tax.

It is right that we continue to raise those points in the chamber and to remind the Labour Party that what it is threatening to do to the industry in Scotland and across the country will impact our farming communities not only now but in the future. I hope that, even at this late stage, the Labour Party will reconsider and remove its plans on inheritance tax, which will have such a large impact on Scottish and UK farming.



16:21

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** I, too, pay tribute to my colleague Mairi Gougeon. I am sorry to hear that she will not be seeking to come back to Parliament. Since she became a minister in 2018, the only time when she has not worked in her current portfolio was when I substituted for her for six months as Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, working with Fergus Ewing and Roseanna Cunningham. Mairi Gougeon is a superb example of someone who works diligently and effectively, and who gets things done during turbulent times.

When I filled the role of Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment for six months, I was reminded, as the MSP who represents the most densely urban part of Scotland, of how important the natural environment and rural affairs are to all of us, including those of us who live in cities.

The Leith Walk ward is the most densely populated part of our country. The wider area of Leith has been, and continues to be, important in the story of Scotland's food and drink success. As a major port in centuries past and in current times, Leith has been a place where manufacturers have made and exported their products. It is also a place where people have come to visit, live and enjoy some of the best of what Scotland has to offer, as they continue to do today. For example, there are three Michelin-starred restaurants, many cafes and other restaurants as well as many—too many to list—pubs and bars.

As colleagues and visitors know, and as the people of Scotland know, Leith is a great destination. Historically, it was where Rose's lime cordial was invented, which is one of the most significant and well-known soft drinks and a product that is used in baking and, of course, in bartending. As a former bartender, I know that well. Crabbie's whisky was made in Leith in years past and continues to be made in Bonnington. Today, we also have the award-winning Woven whisky and the new Port of Leith distillery, which has iconic status as part of the skyline on the Forth and is the world's first and highest vertical distillery.

As well as being home to whisky distilleries, my constituency has five breweries—Cold Town Beer, Pilot Beer, Newbarns Brewery, Campervan Brewery and the Moonwake Beer Co.

Members know—including the member who spoke previously in the debate—that there are also many famous shortbread brands in the area, including Shortbread House of Edinburgh, which has grown in recent years and whose products are enjoyed here, across the world and on airlines.

PekoeTea Edinburgh, in my constituency, is a growing exporter of a variety of teas that are made in Leith. Leith also has many bakeries, including the famous institution that is Storries Bakery, on Leith Walk; the emerging Babyfaced Baker; Mimi's Bakehouse, which has expanded to elsewhere in the city; Mario Patisserie; the Sicilian Pastry Shop; Hobbs House Bakery on Leith Walk; and Krema Bakehouse. All of them are good for celebrating special occasions.

The reason why I list them is that, whether they are in Leith in my constituency or elsewhere in the country, such businesses have been affected through the turbulent times of Covid and as a result of the war in Ukraine, the current Trump Administration's actions, the folly of Brexit and the current national insurance increases, of which we are about to see the worrying effects.

That increase will be one of the biggest mistakes that the Labour Government makes—and it has made several already. I remember Labour members of Parliament talking very passionately before the election last July about how they supported Scotch whisky. One of the first things that the Government did in its first budget was increase the duty on the whisky industry. On such scenarios I say, "You couldn't make it up."

On devolved issues, the cabinet secretary should be aware that I have written to finance ministers with concerns about the effect of land and buildings transaction tax on pubs in my constituency, which is worth looking at. Other members have talked about the challenge of reducing problematic alcohol consumption in our country by supporting our food and drinks industry. It is a sensitive issue. I encourage everyone, when alcohol advertising is considered again, to take a collaborative approach, because the producers in my constituency, along with others, want to be positive contributors to our society and economy. It is also important that smaller businesses can break into markets so that people discover their products. A lot of that is about advertising in the shop and in other ways. Collaborative solutions can be found.

It has not been mentioned yet, but one of the important underlying factors in why our food and drinks industry is so successful—those who create and produce them are most important—is that Scottish water is a mutual product. Water is cheaper here and of such high quality, which we should not underestimate.

16:28

**Ariane Burgess:** During the debate, we have heard a lot about exports. Although they have an important role to play, we must not lose sight of the fact that we need to produce food and drink for

the people of Scotland in a generative and sustainable way.

It is simply not good enough that communities in my region do not have guaranteed access to good nutrition, as the Scottish Human Rights Commission's report "Economic, social & cultural rights in the Highlands & Islands" told us. Nor is it right that children in the country's most deprived areas are struggling with food insecurity and malnutrition, as was highlighted in Food Standards Scotland's recent "Dietary Intake in Scotland's Children" report. Let us export but also ensure that we are making food and drink accessible to all.

Reflecting on today's debate, I agree with Christine Grahame and Clare Haughey that Brexit is one of the biggest threats to the Scottish food and drink sector. It has been an economic disaster for farmers and supply chains. If Scotland had had its wish and had remained in the EU, we would not be talking about how the UK Government is not respecting the provenance of Scotch whisky, which is an issue that Scottish Labour appears to be unclear on.

I also share the concerns raised by several of my colleagues that fisheries are being excluded from the national marine plan. I urge the Government to rethink that so that we can designate parts of the sea to be fished and other parts to be left to nature.

Richard Leonard made some valuable points about seasonal migrant workers. We need to ensure that they are not exploited, that they are properly housed and that they have a voice.

In my opening speech, I spoke about the threats that Scotland's food and drink sector faces. However, there are solutions, which I will now set out. I highlighted the need for multiyear funding for food and drink production. Although the UK Government's decision to remove the ring fencing around Scotland's farming budget was welcome, we still have no idea what the funding will look like from next year. That makes it incredibly difficult for our Government to do its job properly, which, in turn, impacts our food and drink producers, who cannot plan with any certainty or confidently transition to regenerative and sustainable farming practices that will safeguard their future against the climate and nature crises. Multiyear funding and the allocation of an adequate proportion of that money to the food and drink budget would let Scotland achieve those farming goals and allow us to deliver the aims of the expected good food nation plan: creating a healthy and resilient Scotland, protecting our unique cultural identity, opening up high-quality local food for everyone and doing all of that in a just way.

Of course, those solutions will not happen without people, which is why I have been working

with key farming organisations on a proposal that the Government fund the creation of a food production skills pipeline. If we are to shift from a system that prioritises extraction at the expense of everything else to one that requires our producers to look after everything—from soil health and biodiversity to the need to feed people—we will need to upskill all existing food and drink workers and create a pathway that encourages young people to consider a career in the food sector.

I apologise, Deputy Presiding Officer, but the clock does not seem to be working.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Indeed. I apologise for that, but I noted when you started speaking. Adding six minutes to that point takes you to 16:34 and 16 seconds.

**Ariane Burgess:** Thank you very much—that is very precise.

One third of the current workforce will hit retirement age over the next decade, and Scotland needs to be in a position to replace those workers. To do so, we need to offer young people and new entrants the opportunity to get into the food and drink sector—including from school, all the way through university and beyond—and to show them that it is an exciting sector to work in. After all, future food workers will be at the cutting edge of tackling the climate and nature emergencies while feeding people, and they will need to be able to deploy many different skill sets, including those relating to engineering, marketing and technology.

**Finlay Carson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Ariane Burgess:** I will keep going, because I am not sure how much time I have left and I have quite a lot to say. I apologise for that.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government has recognised that proposal from key farming organisations, and I look forward to continuing discussions with the Government on it.

The common thread that runs through all those solutions is diversity. In the face of the threat to food security that is posed by climate change, we need to diversify what we eat. At present, 10 per cent of Scotland's agricultural land is used for crops, and 80 per cent of the grain that we produce is used for animal feed or whisky. We need more fruit, vegetables, cereals and pulses for human consumption. I support the food charity Nourish Scotland's vision for glasshouses, such as those in the Netherlands, that allow fruit and vegetables to be grown pretty much anywhere and allow rural and island communities to benefit economically and access locally grown nutritious food.

If we are to continue to support the whisky industry, it must get what it needs from genuine

regenerative and sustainable sources. There are great examples of distilleries, such as Nc'nean in Morvern, doing that.

Doing all of that would ensure a resilient and healthy system that meets our food needs. We also require a diverse workforce that is made up of new entrants and experienced workers, not only so that the food and drink sector is exposed to different ways of thinking, but so that our rural communities can continue to thrive. That will ensure that Scotland's food and drink sector can survive the hurdles that will be presented over the next decade while, at the same time, we protect our population and preserve our culture.

16:34

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I join the chorus of praise for the cabinet secretary, although she has left the chamber for the moment. At the risk of making a dreadful pun, I am quite convinced that she is off to pastures new rather than being put out to pasture.

That is not the last pun that I will make in a debate on food and drink. Indeed, members would have thought that, in a debate on food and drink, there would be a point of consensus—something that we could all agree on—but we can trust the Scottish Parliament to turn a debate on food and drink into something of a bun fight.

We have heard from a lot of different members about a long list of products: whisky, salmon, seafood, Scotch beef and lamb, shortbread, cheese and dairy products—the list goes on. Scotland has a breadth of food and drink products, some of which are absolutely world leading. The one point of consensus that we heard throughout the chamber was the need to focus on how we can grow, promote and become a genuinely world-leading food nation.

That list is instructive in a number of other ways, including on the importance of some of those products and the nature of our food exports. I will deal with them in order. On whisky, I do not think that Darren Jones, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, could have been clearer on 4 March when he said:

“Scotch whisky is a proud ... brand and export, and this Government will always support the industry.”

**Clare Haughey:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Daniel Johnson:** I will finish the quote.

“I have checked with Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and I can confirm that we will not be watering down the definition of single malt whisky.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 4 March 2025; Vol 763, c 155.]

I understand the concerns, but that is as clear as possible. I also recognise the letter that Douglas Ross mentioned, but I was listening very carefully to him and it is a point about legal competence. It is not an acceptance of the definition.

**Douglas Ross** *rose*—

**Daniel Johnson:** Clare Haughey was the first to attempt an intervention.

**Clare Haughey:** I thank Daniel Johnson for taking my intervention. I hear what he is saying about what was said in the House of Commons, but we have heard a lot from Labour politicians in recent months. In the lead-up to the election, we heard about how they were going to cut fuel costs and energy bills, and those have gone up three times. Does he understand why the Scottish people do not trust what Labour says any more?

**Daniel Johnson:** All that I can point to is the clarity that we have from the Government. More than that, as I indicated in my previous interventions, it is about the priority that the UK Labour Government has placed on whisky in pursuing the trade talks with India. Let us remember that the Indian market is the biggest market for Scotch whisky by volume and it is a market in which Scotch faces a tariff of 150 per cent. That is why the UK Government brought forward its talks in January and why they are so important.

I also want to confirm that the Scotch Whisky Association said—again, I am quoting—that the statement made by Darren Jones was a “welcome statement”. By all means, let us push for clarifications, but I do not think that it could have been clearer.

I am happy to give way to Douglas Ross.

**Douglas Ross:** I am grateful to Daniel Johnson for giving way. He is speaking about clarity, but, when one UK Government minister says something on 4 March and another UK Government minister writes to MSPs on 13 March with distinctly different comments, does he really think that we have any clarity at all?

**Daniel Johnson:** Daniel Zeichner was addressing a different point about legal competence versus what was being accepted.

I will move on. We need to have a debate about salmon, and I know that the Parliament is having that debate and that Ariane Burgess and Beatrice Wishart raised important points about it. Of course, there are issues around the environmental impact of aquaculture. Indeed, there are issues around the environmental impact of all food production. By definition, when we produce food from the land and the sea, we have to think about the environment.

Salmon is, however, a hugely important product and export for this country. We need to work together and look with clear eyes at the issues that the industry is facing and at how we can improve and have the best and highest standards in salmon production in the world. That is exactly what other markets are doing. The Norwegians are not holding back their aquaculture and salmon industries; they are pursuing high quality and seeking to expand. We should support the salmon industry as we pursue those best standards, because we need those jobs and exports. We should support jobs and exports in parts of the country that, quite frankly, would be struggling for industry if it were not for aquaculture.

The other point about that list of products is that the £5 billion of whisky exports and the £1 billion of salmon exports make up £6 billion of the £8 billion of exports in the sector; therefore, we are hugely reliant—dare I say overreliant?—on those two products. We need to challenge ourselves: how can we go further and how can we diversify our food exports? While there are other important products, their export value is measured in hundreds of millions of pounds, not billions of pounds. Where is the strategy to deliver? That is the challenge.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The member talks about the importance of exports, particularly food exports. Does he think that Labour's family farm tax will improve or be detrimental to our exports and our farming communities?

**Daniel Johnson:** Quite simply, tax loopholes that were enjoyed by the likes of Jeremy Clarkson had to be closed. I think that people need to be fair. I recognise the points about the impact and the transition, but transition arrangements are being put in place and there will be a period of time for people to pay that tax. However, when someone inherits a property, they should pay tax—that is my simple point.

Looking internationally, Scotland has £8 billion of food exports but Ireland has €18 billion-worth, which is getting on for double that amount. That should be the scale we aim for. How do we achieve that? Rhoda Grant made some important points about the issues that we need to tackle. How can we grow? In other parts of enterprise policy, we have the Techscaler network and a programme about how businesses and industries can grow. Where is the scaler network for food? We know that, because of the requirements for equipment and capital, growing a food business is much harder than growing a technology business. Likewise, what are our agencies doing? How are they working together to support that growth, enabling businesses to invest in equipment while dealing with complex supply chains and what is

often the very challenging task of selling to the supermarkets? It is scale that we need if we want to deliver jobs and realise the benefit of Scotland's food and drink exports for the whole population.

In closing, I briefly acknowledge the science point about precision breeding and gene editing. I welcome the fact that that has been brought to the chamber, as it is an important issue that we need to have a clear-eyed look at.

16:42

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests as a partner in a farming business.

It is always important that time is given to debating Scotland's food and drink sector, but rarely is it as important as it is now because, as my Scottish Conservative colleagues and other members across the chamber have rightly highlighted, there are real pressures on the sector. Our food and drink sector contributes millions of pounds to Scotland's economy, and it supports tens of thousands of jobs right across the country, many of which are in the rural and island communities of my Highlands and Islands region. It is a vital sector for my region, often forming the backbone of local communities, but it is being let down by both of Scotland's Governments.

I will start with one of the most pressing issues, which has been mentioned repeatedly. I have just highlighted Labour's damaging family farm tax. I had hoped that Rhoda Grant and her Labour colleagues might come to the debate with a little more humility than in previous debates. Perhaps they might even have recognised and accepted the damage that their Government's actions will cause to the rural communities that they are supposed to represent—but they did not. In fact, they hardly mentioned it at all. Daniel Johnson's recent comments will highlight to Scotland's rural communities how little they mean to the Labour Party.

Let us be clear—every pound of additional tax that Labour takes from our farmers is money taken right out of rural communities. It is a barrier to investment. It is a tax on rural and island Scotland, which needs more investment, not less. It is a betrayal of those communities. Every Labour MP and MSP who backs their family farm tax should be ashamed of themselves and ashamed of their failure to stand up for the communities that they are supposed to represent.

I was pleased to join my colleague Tim Eagle in meeting the shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Victoria Atkins, last week and to hear her say unequivocally—with no ifs, no buts—that the next

UK Conservative Government will end Labour's family farm tax.

SNP members should not get too comfortable. They might want to remember that the farmers rally held outside this building only last year was not aimed at the Labour Government at all—although there was rightly a considerable focus on that disastrous Administration. It was focused on Scottish ministers and on what they needed to do to support the industry.

The concerns that those farmers raised at the rally were entirely justified, because we now know that, rather than investing in our rural communities, the rural affairs, land reform and islands portfolio was the only part of the budget that faced a cut, as its funding was down by 3.1 per cent in real terms in 2025-26.

Cattle numbers are dropping and we have a Government that wants to reduce overall red meat consumption. It is a Government that is working against the very interests of a vital sector—a world-leading sector. That makes no sense. Pressures on the supply of red meat mean that cattle and sheep prices are currently good for those left standing, but how long will that last for?

Although my farm is organic, I know of the pressures that rising fertiliser costs are causing for farmers, as well as increasing fuel prices, the cost of Labour's rise in national insurance contributions and other rising costs.

Many farmers feel that the Government, whether in Edinburgh or in London, is disconnected from what is happening in rural communities and the impacts of its policies. It is little wonder that confidence in Government is so low and that anger is growing across the sector. Farmers are frustrated. I have heard more militant language from farming colleagues than ever before. UK and Scottish Government ministers must listen. However, there has also been some frustration with farming leaders, and I hope that they are also listening to the grass roots of our sector.

It is not just rural affairs ministers who have been letting our communities down; across the Scottish Government, ministers have, time and again, been found wanting. Other members have mentioned the importance of vital infrastructure. The SNP's mismanagement of our ferries network—a network that lurches from one crisis to another—severely impacts our food and drink sector, particularly those who are trying to get fresh produce, such as fresh fish, to market.

Our amendment also highlights the importance of our tourism and hospitality sectors. Those sectors have repeatedly been hammered by the SNP. They are already subject to additional costs and regulatory burdens of short-term lets

licensing, with the ill-thought-out visitor levy now hanging over their heads. The hospitality sector was forced to prepare for a deposit return scheme that the Scottish Government was unable to deliver, but not before the sector had to spend tens of millions of pounds preparing for it—money that is now unable to be used for future investment in businesses.

I will turn to some of the speeches from other members. Tim Eagle rightly highlighted the impact of the SNP's decision not to pass on business rates relief support to the hospitality sector, and how the lack of business rates support has stifled growth and investment. He also mentioned the cuts to college places, which have been raised with me by a number of businesses that need skilled workers—particularly younger workers—if they are to grow. Those cuts work against that aim.

Recognising that, and to feed a growing population—the world will not need less food; it will need more—I think that the opportunities for Scotland are clear. Tim Eagle was right to highlight and recognise the importance of gene editing and the role that it can play in improving disease resistance and drought tolerance and in helping to produce higher yields.

Rachael Hamilton and my Highlands and Islands colleague Beatrice Wishart mentioned the pressure on our vital fishing sector and the challenges that are posed by increased spatial squeeze. The sector faces challenges from new offshore wind farms, as well as the uncertainty from cloth-eared policy proposals, such as the SNP's thankfully now-dumped highly protected marine areas.

I urge people to go back and listen to Douglas Ross's speech, as it highlighted the utter confusion in Scottish Labour ranks about English whisky—a confusion that was not improved or cleared up in any way by the speeches from Rhoda Grant or Daniel Johnson.

Craig Hoy called for a “period of regulatory calm” and said that measures should be put in place to “incentivise investment”. I can only imagine how well that would be received by many of Scotland's producers. As a stalwart supporter of Scotland's beer and pub sector, Mr Hoy's warnings that Scotland's pubs are closing at a faster rate than elsewhere in the UK should worry us all. They are often the shop front for many Scottish drinks products and they need support, not what Mr Hoy describes as a “creeping anti-alcohol agenda” from this SNP Government.

I will briefly highlight the speech by Christine Grahame, who I think must be on commission for a number of her local businesses. It was not just Christine Grahame, as other SNP members—

**Christine Grahame:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I have not made my point yet.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member will shortly be bringing his remarks to a close.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** It is fine if Christine Grahame wants to clarify that she is not on commission.

**Christine Grahame:** I just wanted to say: if only.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** That was a valuable contribution from Christine Grahame.

However, that brings us to a more serious point. A number of SNP MSPs spoke about Brexit, but they refused to recognise the fact that the UK market is our most important market. If the SNP were to get its way, Scottish fishermen—who are vital and have been mentioned again and again—would be back in the common fisheries policy and under the control of Brussels. I do not think that that is something that the fishing industry wants.

Richard Leonard gave another impassioned speech, which was mainly an attack on his own Government, which is always very enjoyable. It was interesting how few—in fact, I do not think any—Labour members mentioned the family farm tax.

**Emma Harper:** Will the member accept an intervention?

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

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Before I conclude, it would be remiss of me not to mention some of the fantastic drinks producers in my region. Speyside is the home of the single malt, but decent drams can be found across the Highlands and Islands, including Highland Park and Scapa in Orkney, as well as Isle of Raasay, and there are new distilleries such as the one in Ardnamurchan.

I am proud to be, in some small way, part of Scotland's food and drink production line. Scotland is blessed with land and seas that make us the home of some of the world's best produce, but we must not be complacent. That must be nurtured and supported, which means that both the UK and Scottish Governments must not only listen to industry concerns but act on them as well.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I now call the minister, Jim Fairlie, to respond to the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government.

16:50

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** First, I add my contribution in the light of the fact that Mairi Gougeon is leaving her post. Having worked with and beside her for more than a year, I can say that she has been an absolutely phenomenal cabinet secretary and will be greatly missed by the Scottish Government.

I also associate myself with Douglas Ross's speech, because he eloquently clarified the fact that the Labour Party simply has things confused. I congratulate him on eloquently making that point.

I am delighted to close today's debate on behalf of the Scottish Government, because the subject of it is incredibly close to my heart and epitomises my lifelong passion for and dedication to an industry that I am hugely proud of. I am proud that I have been a part of it, and I am proud of the way that it enhances the phenomenal reputation that our country enjoys. I am proud of the role that the sector plays in the architecture of the landscape that draws the world to Scotland and to be associated with the incredible, talented, hard-working, innovative and creative folk who make the Scottish food and drinks scene as diverse, exciting, colourful and successful as it has been and will continue to be.

This Government is ambitious for Scotland and for our iconic food and drink sector. Unlike the Labour and Conservative parties, we believe in a strong, confident and independent Scotland, and our food and drink sector is absolutely central to that. The Labour and Tory parties simply cannot bring themselves to celebrate and embrace that Scottish success story, which, for more than two decades, has partnered the Scottish Government and become the absolute driver of so much that is to be celebrated about Scotland.

I will make a couple of points about what has been said. Rhoda Grant and Daniel Johnson said that Scotland has not done nearly enough in relation to exports. A 2023 assessment of the value of the red meat sector estimated that it contributes £2.8 billion annually. That figure, which has gone up by more than 16 per cent since 2016, includes more than £1.27 billion of on-farm outputs and £885 million from meat processing. Meanwhile, the QMS annual export survey found that the total value of Scotland's red meat offal sold outside the UK has reached £137 million. The value of such exports had never previously exceeded £100 million. Our dairy sector has seen an increase of more than 140 per cent in the sale of Scottish cheese. The list of products that are exported from Scotland could go on and on.

I refuse to be dragged down by the pessimism that has characterised the speeches of Labour and Tory members, and I want to celebrate the

fabulous businesses and people at the very heart of our amazing food and drink sector. To do that, I will take a wee wander down the road to reflect on why our industry has been so successful. I will also take a positive look at where we want to go, despite the worst efforts of others.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** We all recognise the importance of exports to Scotland. Given the importance to Scotland of exports and of the American market, can the minister tell us whether, when he met Eric Trump, the First Minister raised the issue of tariffs or exports with Mr Trump?

**Jim Fairlie:** The member is asking the wrong person, because I am not the First Minister and I was not in the meeting.

I refuse to be dragged down by the pessimism that has characterised the Labour and Tory speeches. Instead, I will celebrate the fabulous businesses and people who are at the heart of our amazing food and drink sector. In doing so, I will take a wee dauder down the road to look at the positive things that we have done in that sector.

I will start in 2007, when a young whippersnapper of a minister by the name of Richard Lochhead came up with the seemingly odd idea of focusing the Government's attention on what he thought was an overlooked opportunity for Scotland as a whole. At the time, there were organisations such as the Grampian food forum and brilliant businesses such as Walker's Shortbread, which sold products globally before any other food brand was doing that and then helped others to do the same. There were farmers who sold at farmers markets and fishers who were catching fish. However, we as a country failed to recognise that we had the world's best shellfish, which was gracing the tables of some of the best restaurants in Europe and around the world. We now have a proliferation of fabulous restaurants, including Restaurant Andrew Fairlie at Gleneagles and Glenturret Lalique in Perthshire, in my constituency, which also has two stars.

At that time, we talked about exports—it was when we were in the EU, and that was easy for us—but there was no single body or a strategy to bring all of that together and turn it into something co-ordinated and focused that could drive the sector to meet its real potential. I give credit where it is due, because the Liberal Democrat minister, Ross Finnie, asked the sector to come up with a plan to maximise its potential. The Grampian food forum had been doing some work in the same vein. Ideas were swirling around and there were efforts to look at the potential, but none of it had come to fruition at that point.

When Richard Lochhead came up with the idea of the first national food and drink policy for Scotland, the sector was given a food and drink

team and a budget for the first time, which absolutely turbocharged a sector that, up until that point, had been flatlining. The policy turned it into the fastest-growing sector in the Scottish economy. It drove growth, innovation, employment, collaboration and, most of all, ambition. I clearly remember feeling the excitement that I was involved in a vibrant and driven industry that could take on the world and deliver real opportunities for the people of Scotland, and it did that year after year. The growth that we saw was phenomenal. People knew that they were on to something that had substance and longevity, which meant that they could invest, and they knew that they were building resilience and a future for the next generation.

We need to bear in mind that, before we galvanised ourselves, Scotland was famed for deep-fried Mars bars and deep-fried pizzas—it had that reputation. We turned that round to the extent that we are now revered the world over. We now sell beer to the Germans, sushi to the Japanese, chocolate to the Belgians and—thanks to our rapeseed oil—oil to the middle east. There is so much to celebrate, to be proud of and to strive for, and this Government fully intends to keep that ambition going.

We continue to support agriculture to the tune of more than £660 million a year, which includes a £40 million fund that is aimed at producing calves for the beef trade while helping to reduce emissions. That is in stark contrast to the situation in England. The opportunities are there for the sector, with the recent QMS analysis demonstrating that the demand for low-emission, top-quality beef is growing, and our Scotch beef sector is perfectly placed to capitalise on that demand.

**Tim Eagle:** Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

**Jim Fairlie:** I do not have time.

I am told that there is no confidence in the sector, but that is despite the beef price being stratospheric compared with what it was in the past. That is a just reward for decades of commitment from the sector, and there are now even more opportunities because of the demand. The point about the mantra on red and processed meat in the health guidelines is well made but, as we go forward, we can get right behind the message about eating quality, lower-emission meat and target the huge opportunities that exist in that respect.

However, despite all of that, plus the commitments that this Government has made on ensuring direct payments and co-design of policy, there is a lack of confidence. Perhaps we need to

look elsewhere in considering why confidence in the sector is not soaring. Perhaps that is to do with the catastrophic Brexit and the Liz Truss trade deals that have been done with huge agri-producing countries that are eyeing our lucrative market, with even more deals on the horizon. Perhaps it is because the UK Government is completely abandoning any pretence—

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Minister, may I interrupt you for a moment? I am aware that there is quite a lot of noise in the chamber. I would be grateful if colleagues who are coming in and so on could do so quietly.

**Jim Fairlie:** I was in full flow there, Presiding Officer. [*Laughter.*]

Perhaps there is a lack of confidence because farmers are watching a UK Government completely abandon any pretence that it cares what happens to farmers in England and Wales as it takes a wrecking ball to the systems of support for farmers down there. I get that agriculture is devolved, but what message does it send to farmers when they are targeted for inheritance tax, which will impact on the smooth transition of family farms and the viability of those businesses that feed our country? If the agriculture budgets are slashed in England and Wales, what will happen to the block grant allocations? What will the repercussions be up here?

This Government will send the strongest possible message and reassurance that we recognise and value the resilient agricultural sector. We will do so because it is the bedrock of the food and drink sector, which feeds us, generates economic growth and employs hundreds of thousands of people. It helps us to achieve our nature restoration and emissions reduction targets. It is our vehicle for managing and maintaining the architecture of our landscape, which—I am repeating this, but it bears repeating—is a magnet for the world to come and enjoy. In the natural environment in which we harvest venison and game, it helps us to reinstate some of the magnificent landscapes that we are blessed with. We can and should do more to market and celebrate that natural larder, as well as our famed world-class produce.

Reimagining the future using the tools that we had in the past to build the sector, collaborating and working with all the elements of the food and drink industry to optimise the opportunities that are before us, and being imaginative and ambitious are all things that this Government will do to ensure that we have a future that is bursting with ideas, innovation and ambition for those who want to be a part of it. When we do that collectively, the momentum will become unstoppable and will benefit all the people of Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** That concludes the debate on protecting and growing Scotland's iconic food and drink sector. It is time to move to the next item of business.

**Douglas Ross:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The debate that has just concluded started at 2.32 this afternoon. It was due to start 12 minutes earlier, at 2.20. I welcome the fact that three topical questions were selected, and there was a discussion on that.

However, having started 12 minutes later, we still concluded bang on 5 o'clock, and, throughout this afternoon's debate, members have said that they were not able to take interventions because there was no time in hand. When a debate of such importance starts later, is there no latitude for decision time to be at, potentially, a quarter past 5 rather than 5 o'clock, so that we can have a proper debate?

**The Presiding Officer:** Our business is agreed by the Parliament—and has been agreed in this instance. There is usually some flex in a debate; that means that the time that is scheduled for the debate is as the debate management timeline would have it. Where the Parliament has agreed a specific decision time, it is very important that that is adhered to wherever possible.

**Douglas Ross:** Further to my point of order, just for clarity and not to question your ruling, Presiding Officer, the Parliamentary Bureau allocated a certain amount of time for the debate. Because the debate started later, we members had less time. Can decision time not be postponed slightly, to allow the full allocation that the business bureau had given for the debate?

**The Presiding Officer:** For clarity, Mr Ross, every member who spoke in the debate received their allocated time. The time that was used up in topical questions might have been extra time in the debate, if you understand. However, all members received the allocated time per member that was agreed in advance. The time that members were allowed was not shortened but was as expected. The flexibility in a debate is impacted if earlier items of business continue.

I hope that that is helpful.



## 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 question is, that amendment S6M-16839.2, in the name of Tim Eagle, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16839, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on protecting and growing Scotland's iconic food and drink sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access digital voting.

17:03

*Meeting suspended.*

17:06

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment S6M-16839.2, in the name of Tim Eagle, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16839, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on protecting and growing Scotland's iconic food and drink sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**The Minister for Equalities (Kaukab Stewart):**

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not connect in time and has not registered my vote, although I was getting assistance. I would have voted no.

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

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

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

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)

Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**Against**

Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 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)

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) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 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)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-16839.2, in the name of Tim Eagle, is: For 46, Against 64, Abstentions 3.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-16839.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16839, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on protecting and growing Scotland's iconic food and drink sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 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)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-16839.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, is: For 24, Against 85, Abstentions 6.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-16839, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on protecting and growing Scotland's iconic food and drink sector, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the value and importance of Scotland's food and drink sector in terms of economic benefits, its particular importance to Scotland's rural and island communities and, importantly, its role in enhancing Scotland's reputation on a global scale; further recognises the risks of the proposal for an English whisky geographical indication that could undermine Scotch whisky and single malt, which is central to the economy; acknowledges the challenges and opportunities faced by the sector in an ever-changing world; calls for cross-party support to ensure that the sector continues to receive backing and support in

order to grow sustainably and contribute to a prosperous and thriving economy; notes the new risk from tariffs, and calls on the UK Government to do all that it can to protect Scotland's businesses and consumers from their impact.

## MacDiarmid's Brownsbank

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-16290, in the name of Clare Adamson, on MacDiarmid's Brownsbank cottage: a Scottish cultural treasure. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament commends the work of MacDiarmid's Brownsbank; notes that it is a charitable organisation, which was founded in 2015 to preserve and promote the legacy of Brownsbank Cottage in the Peebleshire Hills near Biggar, South Lanarkshire; understands that Brownsbank Cottage is an A-listed building, most notably remembered as the former home of the renowned poet, Christopher Murray Grieve, who was better known by his pen-name, Hugh MacDiarmid; further understands that the charity works to restore and upgrade the cottage, to conserve its contents, to promote the works of Hugh MacDiarmid nationally and internationally, to re-establish the Brownsbank Writing Fellowship for writers in residence to work from the cottage and to generate educational and community creative involvement, as well as promote literary tourism; recognises that Hugh MacDiarmid stood as a significant Scottish poet, journalist, essayist and political figure, and believes that he is widely regarded as one of the most influential Scottish writers of the 20th century, making a profound and lasting impact on Scottish culture and politics; acknowledges that MacDiarmid's Brownsbank has, to date, been supported by the Clyde Wind Farm Community and Development Fund, Architectural Heritage Fund, SSE Renewables Community Investment Programme, the William Grant Foundation and generous donations from the public, but that further support is urgently required; notes that distinguished past occupants of Brownsbank include the award-winning author and publisher, Matthew Fitt, and James Robertson, the inaugural Scottish Parliament Writer in Residence and author of the Booker Prize-nominated, *The Testament of Gideon Mack*; believes that Brownsbank Cottage has made an indelible imprint on Scottish cultural heritage and that its preservation, with immediate works required, is a cultural priority; commends the board of trustees and volunteers of MacDiarmid's Brownsbank on what it sees as their tireless efforts to protect and promote this historical Scottish landmark; notes the view that the protection and development of Scotland's literary heritage is vital to the nation's cultural health, identity and confidence, and further notes the calls for the Scottish and UK governments to assist with the restoration of Brownsbank Cottage, to preserve this historic and national treasure.

17:12

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I thank my colleagues for supporting the motion for debate, and I welcome to the public gallery the trustees and friends of the charity MacDiarmid's Brownsbank, including members of the Grieve family, who have joined us this evening. They are the custodians of MacDiarmid's legacy, and their ambitions for his former cottage

at Brownsbank in Biggar deserve our collective attention. I also pay tribute to my friend and colleague, Mairi McAllan MSP; Brownsbank cottage sits in her Clydesdale constituency and she has been an avid supporter of the work of the trust and the restoration efforts. We are excited to welcome her back to the Parliament soon.

Today, we reflect on a figure of international significance. I am reminded of listening, a long time ago, to "Bookclub" on Radio 4. James Naughtie was interviewing Maya Angelou and introduced her as one of the greatest black writers of the 20th century. She immediately picked him up and said, "I'm considered one of the best writers of the 20th century—I just happen to be black."

I think that the same could be said of MacDiarmid. He writes mainly in Scots, but he is more than just a Scots writer, and Scots writers should be recognised for their international efforts and talents. I am reminded that some of the greatest experts on MacDiarmid, and some of Scotland's greatest writers and professors of literature and Scots language, are in the gallery this evening—so there is no pressure at all on anyone who is speaking in the debate to get things right.

A few weeks ago, I attended the Association for Scottish Literature international lecture by Petra Johana Poncarová of the University of Glasgow and Charles University in Prague, who is currently a Marie Curie fellow at the University of Glasgow. She was speaking about Gaelic and Scots in the 20th and 21st centuries. She had undertaken a wealth of research on MacDiarmid and showed not only that he loved the Scots language and was committed to bringing it back into common usage and parlance in Scotland, but that he had a great influence on the Gaelic revival in Scotland, translating many of our Gaelic poets into Scots and sharing that work in a number of publications and magazines. We are perhaps not as familiar with that as we are with some of MacDiarmid's other work.

MacDiarmid was never afraid to question conventional ideas. He believed that reviving the Scots language in poetry was about not just literature, but reclaiming Scotland's artistic character and culture to assert its independence and revitalise a literature that he saw as weighed down by sentimentality. His vision was to move away from the overly sentimental writing of the past and create something bold—something uniquely Scottish.

His commitment to those ideals, and his radical advocacy, are the reasons why we now recognise the Scottish renaissance in the Scots language. MacDiarmid himself described that movement as

“a new insistence on the Scots Lallans language in the first place and, beyond that, on the need to restore Gaelic as the national language of Scotland and to resume in the fullest way the great traditions of our lost heritage of Gaelic culture, and to apply these to new creative purposes.”

He saw language as the foundation of cultural revival, and his work embodied that belief.

He was ever controversial—in fact, many of my colleagues knew him personally and will speak to that. He was often a cantankerous character, shall we say, and his writings were often polemic, frequently contradictory and enduringly influential.

His passion was not just linguistic—it was political, too. He was a founding member of the National Party of Scotland, which became the Scottish National Party. At the same time, he was a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and in 1964, he stood as a Communist Party candidate against the then Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home.

MacDiarmid believed that Scottish identity and the lives of the people who lived here were ill served by the political establishment. His belief in the cultural and political significance of language was unshakeable, and that conviction is embodied in Brownsbank cottage. It is an A-listed building—the only one of its type in Britain to hold that status—not necessarily because of its architectural significance, but because of its former resident. The interior has been carefully preserved to reflect the character, and the two main rooms—those of MacDiarmid and his wife, Valda Trevlyn Grieve—are there to be seen. The shelves in MacDiarmid’s rooms are filled with green-spined Penguin crime novels alongside copies of his own work. Today, the cottage is a cherished site of heritage, loved and respected not just by the people of Scotland but by many beyond our borders.

The cottage has been a writers residence for some of our greatest living writers, some of whom are in the gallery this evening, such as Matthew Fitt and James Robertson, and Professor Alan Riach. Writers fellowships nurture creativity, providing space for writers to explore new styles and perspectives while shaping Scotland’s ever-evolving cultural identity.

We need to secure Brownsbank cottage for the future of Scotland. I am sure that some members may talk about the

“little white rose of Scotland”,

which, although I do not think that that was quite MacDiarmid’s view, has nonetheless been adopted by the SNP as a symbol of our national party in this Parliament. Some may mention “A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle”. However, I spent some time with Matthew Fitt—who is, as I said, in the public gallery tonight—in Cleland primary

school in my constituency. I saw the young people working with him in the Scots language, and learning about it. The joy and the confidence that it gave them to know that the language that they used with their families every day was good made me think of a MacDiarmid children’s poem, which I will quote. It is called “The Bubblyjock”, which is a male turkey.

“It’s hauf like a bird and hauf like a bogle  
And juist stands in the sun there and bouks  
Its a wunder its heid disna burst  
The way it’s aye raxin its chouks

Syne it twists its neck like a serpent  
But canna get oot a richt note  
For the bubblyjock swallowed the bagpipes  
And the blether stuck in its throat.”

[*Applause.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Adamson. Indeed, I can also confirm that Matthew Fitt was a somewhat tenacious midfield player for the Mylnes Court Warriors—a passion at the University of Edinburgh in the late 1980s.

With that, we move to the open debate.

17:19

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I am really pleased to speak in support of the motion and I thank Clare Adamson for bringing the debate to the chamber. We do not get enough opportunity to talk about Scotland’s long and proud cultural history. Scotland is the homeland of many nationally and internationally recognised artists, writers, musicians and dramatists, and no more so than in the world of poetry, in which the national bard, Robert Burns, has introduced people around the globe to Scottish culture and drawn many of them to Scotland to see what else it has to offer.

Poetry, perhaps more than any other form of writing, is often shaped by the writer’s direct experiences and the places where they live. If we want to truly understand these writers and the minds that crafted their immortal works, therefore, we need to look beyond the words and to the world in which they were crafted. That is why initiatives such as MacDiarmid’s Brownsbank are so important in preserving the wider works of poets such as Hugh MacDiarmid.

As a proud son of Ayrshire, I could not allow the debate to pass without drawing parallels between Brownsbank and Robert Burns’s cottage in Alloway. As members will know, Burns’s cottage offers visitors an insight into the world in which Robert Burns was born, with the surrounding area providing the inspiration for many of his later works. In contrast, Brownsbank cottage was a feature of MacDiarmid’s later years. However, both buildings have become synonymous with

their occupants, and both bring their own insights into the minds of those two gifted writers.

While Burns cottage has been preserved by the National Trust for Scotland, however, Brownsbank is reliant on the hard work of members of the Scottish charitable incorporated organisation that was created to preserve both the cottage and Hugh MacDiarmid's legacy. The organisation is funded—as Clare Adamson's motion points out—principally through the generosity of grant funding from the likes of the SSE Clyde wind farm development fund, the Architectural Heritage Fund and the William Grant Foundation, as well as through the generosity of individual members of the public who are committed to preserving Hugh MacDiarmid's cultural legacy.

It is to the credit of everybody who is involved in those groups that they do not see the objective purely as preserving Hugh MacDiarmid's past; they are also looking to the future, using his works to inspire and encourage the next generation of writers. I am delighted that, from the reinvestment in a writers-in-residence programme to the creation of a poetry board scheme for pupils in South Lanarkshire to showcase their efforts, aspiring writers will have the opportunity to build their talents on such strong foundations.

Although he may have been a controversial figure at times, there is no doubting the cultural impact of Hugh MacDiarmid. The work that is done by the MacDiarmid's Brownsbank SCIO will give him an enduring legacy that is hugely worth while in terms of not only his own work, but how the initiative speaks to Scotland's cultural confidence and identity and to our commitment as a nation to valuing and protecting that heritage.

As Clare Adamson's motion highlights, we cannot afford to see buildings such as Brownsbank fall into disrepair. The cottage and other buildings like it have offered a spark of inspiration to many of Scotland's most successful and influential literary figures. There are many arguments for their preservation, but Hugh MacDiarmid himself put it quite succinctly when he said, "You cannot light a match on a crumbling building."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Emma Harper—you have around four minutes, Ms Harper.

17:23

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer, for allowing me to finagle wi ma keyboard to make sure that it will actually stand up to the debate.

I thank Clare Adamson for securing the debate. She has articulated very well in her motion and in

her speech the importance of Brownsbank cottage and the work that is being done by the trustees and volunteers on what is, though it may be an underappreciated corner of Scotland's literary tradition, a shining star in 20th century history. I am proud to be an MSP for the area. Clare Adamson has welcomed everybody to chamber, and I masel will welcome everyyin tae the chamber the nicht, tae.

MacDiarmid was born and schooled in Langholm, also known as the muckle toon and pairt o my South Scotland region. For the first 60 years of his life, however, his home is hard to pin down, although his formative years appear again and again in his work, with large sections of "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle" referring back to his youth in Langholm.

After leaving Langholm academy, he wound up in Edinburgh, followed by Ebbw Vale in Wales, Clydebank, Forfar and Montrose; then—in the space of a little over a decade—came London, Liverpool, West Sussex and Whalsay in Shetland, where visitors today can stay in the hoose he made his hame for nine years; and then Glasgow, Dungavel and finally, too, Brownsbank.

It may have been his last home, but it was his longest lasting, and its preservation is a tribute to his wife Valda, who he predeceased, and to the trustees and volunteers who have worked so hard over the years to maintain and promote Brownsbank as a memorial to the man and his body of work.

MacDiarmid's role in the use of the Scots language and its written form cannae be overestimated, and colleagues will shairly ken how important the Scots leid is tae me in the chamber. Hugh MacDiarmid wance said of the Scots leid:

"One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Vernacular, part of its very essence, is its insistent recognition of the body, the senses ... This explains the unique blend of the lyrical and the ludicrous".

He demonstrated that through his own body of work: always lyrical and frequently ludicrous, surreal and moving. His publishing in Scots gave credence to the language at a time when received wisdom and the dominant establishment view was that Scots was the language of the gutter or of the undereducated.

Reading again through "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle" for today's debate, I think that his love and admiration for another Scots poet, Robert Burns, shines through, although perhaps not his admiration for some who hing their pegs on his poetry while missing the human meaning behind it. Both poets shared a lowland Scots upbringing and a sense that Scotland and its people needed recorded and shared with others, but in a multiplicity of ways, with the diversity of our land at

the heart of what they wrote—or, as MacDiarmid himself said:

“Scotland small? Our multiform, our infinite Scotland small?”

No doubt Burns would have smiled as MacDiarmid screeved that oot.

Next year, MacDiarmid’s “The Bonnie Broukit Bairn” will be added to the higher English set text list. It is a tribute to his body of work and to the impact that he has had on our nation’s sense of its literary self and the language that we use day after day, that tens o thoosans o weans an bairns will hae the chance tae study his verse in the same context as Burns, Stevenson and John Byrne. In the same way, the work of Brownsbank is keeping alive MacDiarmid’s legacy and life fur oor generation and future generations, celebrating a body o work that has stood, and will stand, the test o time as the work o one o oor great poets and writers.

[Applause.]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I gently discourage those in the public gallery from participating, including through applause.

17:27

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I, too, thank Clare Adamson for leading this debate in Parliament tonight.

MacDiarmid remains politically controversial, but artistically revered. His very identity was provocative—the striking imagery of Norman MacCaig captures it best:

“CM Grieve dived in at one end, and Hugh MacDiarmid swam ashore at the other.”

By the age of 16, he was a member of the Independent Labour Party. He left, and then, when he fell within the orbit of James Keir Hardie in South Wales, he rejoined. In 1922, he was first co-opted, then elected, as an Independent Socialist to Montrose Town Council. He joined the Communist Party in the 1930s and then the National Party of Scotland.

Expelled from the Communist Party for being a nationalist, expelled from the National Party of Scotland for being a communist, he stood as the SNP candidate in the Kelvingrove division of Glasgow in the 1945 general election, and again, in the 1950 general election, but this time as an independent Scottish nationalist.

In 1956—at the very point when many others left it for good, as the Soviets suppressed the Hungarian uprising, and the revelations about Stalinism emerged—he rejoined the Communist Party, standing as the CPGB candidate against the then Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home,

in the Kinross and West Perthshire constituency in the 1964 general election. His poetry included “Hymns to Lenin”, who he said marked “the greatest turnin’ point” since Christ.

Of John Maclean’s “unbreakable spirit”, he declared:

“Like a lightning-bolt at last the workers’ wrath falls  
On all such castles of cowards whether they be  
Uniformed in ermine, or blue, or khaki.”

Hugh MacDiarmid’s poetry has an enduring, timeless quality, and so speaks to our times as well as his own. My own party’s current leaders should take heed.

“Physical power”,

he wrote,

“Is a rough substitute for patience and intelligence, and  
co-operative effort in the governance of man”,

and

“killing is the ultimate simplification of life.”

“The Kind of Poetry I Want”,

MacDiarmid proclaimed, is

“a poetry that stands for production, use, and life  
As opposed to property, profits and death.”

He was at once an idealist and a realist, famously combining the two in the poem “Glasgow 1960”, published in 1935, in which he imagines crowds packed tight on buses and trams travelling to Ibrox stadium not for football but to watch a debate between intellectuals.

There are anti-imperialist writings that bleed dangerously into an intolerable anglophobia but, as the late Stephen Maxwell put it—members of the SNP and Alba should heed this—MacDiarmid’s was a nationalism

“to transcend nationality and to present Scotland not as the possessor of distinctive national qualities, but as an exemplar of universal intellect and aesthetic qualities, which rendered trivial all lesser distinctions.”

I am pleased to support the motion and the Brownsbank cottage project, because we need to keep that flame of intellect and culture burning. Whether we consider MacDiarmid to be a communist at heart, a nationalist in his soul or simply one of the greatest poets of the 20th century, we need to remember him and celebrate him and the values that he stood for.

That leads me to my final point. Before MacDiarmid moved to Brownsbank cottage, he and Valda lived in the laundry cottage on the Duke of Hamilton’s estate at Dungavel. Dungavel, to our shame, continues today to be run as a detention centre for asylum seekers—a so-called immigration removal centre. I hope that, tonight, in this debate, we can resolve that, as well as keeping open Brownsbank, we also pledge to do

everything that we can in the name of our common humanity to close down Dungavel and regain, in the words of Hugh MacDiarmid,

“the grounds of our being”.

[*Applause.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I again ask those in the public gallery not to applaud. This is a meeting in public, not a public meeting.

I invite the cabinet secretary to respond to the debate.

17:33

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I am grateful to Clare Adamson for lodging the motion and securing the debate. It is right that we celebrate the life and legacy of Hugh MacDiarmid and mark the work of the Brownsbank trustees, whom I have met in the past. I commend their efforts in promoting the preservation of this legendary poet’s work and home for future generations to enjoy. I thank the various speakers in the debate for their valuable and interesting contributions.

I begin by reflecting on Hugh MacDiarmid’s life, as others have remembered him, offering a few personal reflections. As we have heard, Christopher Murray Grieve was born in 1892 in Langholm, in what is now Dumfries and Galloway. He died in 1978, aged 86. He was a voracious reader as a boy, which set him up well for his future careers, in which he celebrated words and languages. He was a pupil at Broughton high school, the school that I would attend—many decades later, I hasten to add. Indeed, there was house that was named after him—Grieve house.

As a young journalist, MacDiarmid reported on the challenges facing those living in the mining communities of Wales for a socialist newspaper run by Keir Hardie, the Scottish founder and leader of the Labour Party. By the early 1920s, his political consciousness was growing, shaped, no doubt, by the seismic events around him: the first world war of 1914 to 1918, the Easter rising in Ireland in 1916, the Russian revolution in 1917 and his own experiences during time spent in the military.

As we have heard, MacDiarmid’s political views changed over time; they reportedly encompassed socialism, communism, labour values and Scottish nationalism. Notably, from my perspective, he was a founding member of the National Party of Scotland in 1928. I wonder what he would have made of our debate in the Scottish Parliament this evening and of the event that follows it, organised by the Brownsbank trust, to celebrate his life, his work and his home.

By 1922, Grieve had begun to use the pseudonym “Hugh MacDiarmid” when he published a verse in Scots, and his early writing heralded a new literary movement in Scotland. Hugh MacDiarmid is rightly associated with the Scots language, and he was also a strong supporter of the promotion and use of Gaelic, as were others who, with him, formed the Scottish literary renaissance.

Today, the Scottish Government has a number of interventions and projects in place to support Gaelic and Scots, with new funding to be provided in 2025-26. The Scottish Government supports bodies such as the Association of Scottish Literary Studies, the Scottish Book Trust, Scots Hoose and the Scots Language Centre. Those organisations built on Hugh MacDiarmid’s legacy by further enriching Scots language literature and raising the status of Scots in our public and cultural life.

Hugh MacDiarmid experienced years of exile, collapse and recovery in the 1930s, and he continued to dominate the Scottish literary world, even as he aged. His work in the 1950s and 1960s continued his fascination with languages and art forms as he sought to celebrate human creativity in all its aspects.

MacDiarmid’s legacy continues to help build Scotland’s reputation and inspires academic and international links. In 2023, the Université de Bretagne Occidentale, which is based in Brest, held the first international Hugh MacDiarmid conference. The Scottish Government is keen to take advantage of such opportunities in future to celebrate the legacy of poets such as Hugh MacDiarmid domestically and internationally, particularly as we continue to expand our links with Scotland’s diaspora.

It is a testimony to the vision and tenacity of the Brownsbank trustees, the support provided by MSPs from across the Parliament and the advice provided to the trustees by our national bodies that we are discussing Hugh MacDiarmid’s huge and lasting legacy in Scotland today. The debate is a reflection of the importance of protecting the place where he lived for the last 27 years of his life, for it was at Brownsbank cottage that Hugh MacDiarmid lived with his wife, Valda Trevlyn, from 1951 to 1978.

The story of the cottage forms part of our heritage, which defines who we are as a nation and is hugely inspirational, helping to create a powerful sense of place and providing a backdrop against which we live, work and have fun.

The Scottish Government delivers support for the historic environment through sponsorship of Historic Environment Scotland. Through its grant schemes, HES delivers benefits for communities by helping to regenerate and promote the active



use, care and maintenance of the historic environment. I understand that Historic Environment Scotland provided feedback to the Brownsbank trust on a previous proposal, and I encourage the trust to continue engaging with our public bodies.

Hugh MacDiarmid's commitment to Scotland and to literature has left a remarkable legacy for us. I congratulate everyone who took part in the debate and commend Hugh MacDiarmid's work to everyone with an interest in the complexities of our history, which continue to shape us today. I commend, too, the work of the Brownsbank trustees in securing Hugh MacDiarmid's former home for future generations to enjoy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate.

*Meeting closed at 17:38.*



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

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