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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

Wednesday 30 April 2025

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 30 April 2025

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is Deputy First Minister responsibilities, economy and Gaelic. Members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question.

Question 1 has not been lodged.

#### Social Enterprises

2. **Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting social enterprises. (S6O-04577)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): The Scottish Government fully recognises the importance of social enterprises and their valuable contribution to Scotland's economy. Investing in social enterprise is crucial for our vision of progressing towards an economy that is fairer and greener, and which has inclusive growth at its heart. Funding for the sector has been protected at £6.2 million for next year.

**Marie McNair:** Crafting Together, which is a social enterprise in my constituency of Clydebank and Milngavie, has done amazing work in providing employment opportunities for those with additional support needs, but more can still be done to improve the rates of employment. Can the cabinet secretary advise what action can be taken to improve employment rates for those with additional support needs? Would she be willing to come to Clydebank to meet Crafting Together to discuss what it has on offer?

**Kate Forbes:** Organisations such as Crafting Together, as Marie McNair has said, are doing great work in supporting those with additional support needs to find and stay in employment. I am sure that the Minister for Employment and Investment, as the lead minister on these matters, would be delighted to meet Crafting Together to hear more about its work.

We are committed to halving the disability employment gap and supporting disabled people and those with additional support needs into employment, and I commend Crafting Together for all that it does in that regard.

### Economic Growth Opportunities (Tartan Week 2025)

3. **Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what opportunities it has identified to grow Scotland's economy, following tartan week 2025. (S6O-04578)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): The First Minister's visit to the United States for tartan week focused on supporting Scotland's economic growth. The key opportunities that were identified included welcoming more US investment in financial services, technology and renewable energy; championing quality Scottish products against the backdrop of tariffs and volatility; and showcasing Scotland's top-class cultural and higher education institutions. The First Minister's visit achieved each one of those objectives.

The US is Scotland's second largest export market for goods and services, after the European Union. Around 16.4 per cent of our exports go to the USA, totalling more than £5 billion, and engagement with the USA around economic opportunities is therefore absolutely vital.

**Michelle Thomson:** I thank the Deputy First Minister for that full response. I was fortunate enough to attend tartan week celebrations to represent the Scottish Parliament, and I was struck by the warmth with which the Scottish culture, heritage and traditions, and our products and services, were met. The DFM correctly highlights the value of our export market, but what assessment has been made of the specific economic value not only of celebrations such as tartan week, but of promoting brand Scotland to the US and other global markets more widely?

**Kate Forbes:** I confess to being slightly jealous of Michelle Thomson's trip over that period. The Scottish Government, alongside other brand Scotland partners, uses moments such as tartan week to showcase Scotland's innovation and culture through events and media promotion.

With regard to the economic analysis that is done, we look at a number of different sources, always looking at how we can improve the data work that we do; I know that Michelle Thomson has a long-standing interest in that. That type of work has helped to maintain Scotland as the second highest area for inward investment in the United Kingdom, after London, in nine of the past 10 years according to EY. The EY data is helpfully

granular with regard to where those investors originate and the confidence that they have in Scotland.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

The Scottish tourist sector is excited at the prospects for the future, because some people who may have planned to travel to the United States are now reluctant to do so, which provides opportunities for tourism here. At the business in the Parliament conference that both the Deputy First Minister and I were at on Friday, people who are involved in tourism raised concerns that they have about the handicaps that the sector faces around taxation, business rates, short-term let licensing and the visitor levy. Although the tourism sector is optimistic about increased visitor numbers, hospitality margins are extremely tight. What specific help will the Scottish Government provide to those in that sector that are looking to expand?

**Kate Forbes:** In this year's budget, we allocated an additional £2 million to VisitScotland in order to ensure that, first, there is increased footfall in terms of visitor numbers, and that visitors from new markets come to Scotland so that we can maintain international competitiveness. Secondly, that money will also support efforts to encourage visitors to spread their travel across Scotland, rather than concentrating on some of the most-visited destinations, so that the whole country can benefit from the economic value that comes from tourism.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will call Mr Whittle to as question 4, despite the fact that he has just arrived in the chamber. There are colleagues who want to ask supplementaries to it.

### Ayrshire Growth Deal

4. **Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I apologise to the chamber for my tardiness.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the delivery of the Ayrshire growth deal. (S6O-04579)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** Scottish Government investment of more than £100 million in the Ayrshire growth deal, matched by United Kingdom Government funding, is expected to unlock private investment of around £300 million and deliver around 7,000 new jobs, transforming the local economy for the benefit of all our people and places. Construction has just begun on phase one of the £14 million great harbour project. Governments have approved outline business cases for the £23 million Ayrshire manufacturing investment corridor and the £9 million marine tourism programme, enabling those important projects to progress to the next stage,

and work is continuing at pace on new projects that will support the aerospace sector at Prestwick, which I know is of interest to Mr Whittle.

**Brian Whittle:** As the cabinet secretary will know, last week, I facilitated a meeting at the Prestwick aerospace cluster to discuss the potential of the Ayrshire growth deal to deliver at least 1,500 well-paid, highly skilled jobs in Ayrshire, in addition to the 3,500 proposed jobs from XLCC in North Ayrshire. Securing the skilled workforces that those businesses need will be a key factor in ensuring that those major international companies commit to investing millions of pounds in Ayrshire, which is why everyone who was at the meeting was so concerned to hear that Ayrshire College is not only facing funding cuts but that its potential to support economic growth in Ayrshire is apparently being overlooked in favour of Scotland's cities.

Can the cabinet secretary explain why Ayrshire College, and indeed Ayrshire more widely, continually seems to be an afterthought for the Scottish Government? How does she propose to ensure that the Ayrshire growth deal moves forward at pace in order to secure that vital inward investment?

**Kate Forbes:** I believe that Ayrshire is the vanguard and is at the forefront of delivering economic opportunity, particularly in and around clusters such as the Prestwick cluster. I was sorry that I could not attend Mr Whittle's meeting on 23 April, which I had communicated to the member in advance. However, I, too, have meetings in the diary and will be engaging with some of the businesses that were in attendance in order to make it clear that the Scottish Government supports the Prestwick cluster and the opportunities in aerospace and other sectors.

Ayrshire College is key, and I have had the privilege of visiting it before. Time and again, skills are identified as one of the major challenges to achieving business opportunities in the area. I am keen to work with the college and the sector more generally to ensure that we realise those opportunities, and that there are no impediments to doing that.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Over the next five years, Ayrshire will have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to consolidate and grow its globally competitive manufacturing footprint through XLCC in Hunterston and our aerospace industry at Prestwick, boosting Scotland's wider supply chain. A highly skilled and motivated workforce will be key to the delivery of those objectives. How will the Scottish Government ensure that we have the skilled workforce that is essential to ensuring that those ambitions are realised in the numbers that are required?

**Kate Forbes:** The member is absolutely right, and, a couple of weeks ago in the United Arab Emirates, I had the privilege of supporting XLCC as it pitched and showcased what it is trying to achieve, which demonstrates the international interest in the progress that it is making. We also talked about aerospace there.

The workers are critically important. Having met a number of apprentices, I know that there is significant interest in working in those jobs. There is huge demand, and we are committed to working with Skills Development Scotland, which oversees the apprenticeship programmes and administers funding, to ensure that Ayrshire College can play a key role in meeting the demand and ensuring that there is a pipeline in place.

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I recently sent a letter to the Ayrshire councils seeking an update on the deal's delivery. The response acknowledged that progress on delivery had not been as originally envisaged and noted that, at the halfway point of the programme's lifetime, only a small percentage of available investment had been realised. It also noted that, in response to delays, partners, in consultation with the Government, had undertaken a review of the programme.

Can the Government advise when the decision to review was made and what the outcome of the review was, to ensure that my constituents can see the potential and the benefits of economic growth?

**Kate Forbes:** As the member knows, part of the reason for the situation that she outlines is that a number of projects did not proceed as originally envisaged. However, we are all keen to ensure that information about the new projects can be communicated clearly and quickly. Late last year, both Governments approved the trajectory of a number of changes across the Ayrshire deal capital programme that should pave the way for a greater pace of delivery. We are working with Ayrshire Council, and, in the past few months, I have personally convened a meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland and senior representatives from the council in order to accelerate the pace of delivery.

### **Infrastructure Support (South-west Scotland)**

**5. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what funding will be available to help infrastructure projects in south-west Scotland. (S6O-04580)

**The Minister for Business (Richard Lochhead):** Each year, the Scottish Government provides funding for local government to deliver infrastructure to best meet councils' needs. Additionally, through the borderlands deal, we will

invest £85 million to drive regional economic growth. In the south-west, that includes £16 million for the redevelopment of the Stranraer marina, £4 million for the dairy innovation centre and £20 million for the deal's place programme to improve places to live and work across the region.

We are also investing significant funding through the £2 billion learning estate investment programme, which will support the delivery of projects such as the new Dumfries high school.

**Finlay Carson:** Regrettably, the amount of money that is spent on transport infrastructure in the south-west corner has been non-existent in comparison with other areas, and is reported to be as little as 0.5 per cent of the total Scottish infrastructure spend.

As the minister will be aware, the century-old concrete bridge in my home town of Kirkcudbright has been ruled unsafe, leaving the town effectively split in two. I previously pressed the First Minister for additional funding to allow a new bridge to be constructed, but my plea fell on deaf ears, despite the Scottish Government providing £40 million of funding to open the Destiny bridge in the First Minister's constituency, as well as £33 million towards the Kessock bridge over the Beaully Firth and £12.5 million to build a bridge at Markle in East Lothian to replace the level crossing. Does the minister agree with my constituents in what is now regarded as not the forgotten part of Scotland but the ignored part of Scotland that that stinks horribly of double standards and further dismissal of the needs of the people of the south-west of Scotland?

**Richard Lochhead:** Despite the political points that he makes, the member raises serious concerns about the Kirkcudbright bridge. However, his stance is ironic, given the list of investments that I read out in my initial remarks. It is unfortunate that he has taken that stance, given the many exciting investments that are taking place in the south of Scotland.

The member mentioned the First Minister. Of course, the First Minister recently replied to the member in relation to his concerns about the Kirkcudbright bridge, and was pleased to point out that Dumfries and Galloway Council's website states:

"The Kirkcudbright Bridge project has been confirmed within the council's capital investment programme for financial year 2025/26."

Clearly, the Scottish budget delivered additional capital expenditure for many parts of Scotland. The issues are being addressed to the best of our ability, and I hope that the council is able to take that project forward sooner rather than later.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** The recent visit by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport

to the south-west to hear from the campaigns seeking upgrades to the A75 and A77 was welcome. How will the cabinet secretary continue to ensure that the south-west gets the infrastructure and investment that it needs, including, if possible, support for the Kirkcudbright bridge, and engage with stakeholders across Dumfries and Galloway to fully maximise the economic potential of the south-west, as the Scottish Government has done through its hugely welcome funding for the Stranraer Millennium Centre? I invite the minister or the Deputy First Minister to come and see the difference that the funding has made for the community.

**Richard Lochhead:** I welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Transport's recent visit to the south-west and her commitment to on-going engagement with all stakeholders who are keen to see improvements to the roads mentioned.

On wider investment planning, the Scottish Government must wait for the outcome of the United Kingdom Government spending review in June to understand what the impacts will be for Scotland. Thereafter, we will publish a reset of our infrastructure investment pipeline, which will set out investment plans for the coming years.

In relation to Emma Harper's invite, I regularly visit the south of Scotland, as do my colleagues. If she wishes to write to us, we will, I hope, respond positively to the invitation.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Infrastructure investment is vital to economic growth in the south-west of Scotland and across the whole country, but we know that cost overruns are one of the significant barriers to that. A recent Boston Consulting Group report on the cost of infrastructure across the UK highlighted that rail in the UK costs three times as much per kilometre as it does in France, and road costs almost twice as much.

What analysis is the Scottish Government doing of why infrastructure costs more in Scotland, and how can we tackle that to deliver more infrastructure to deliver growth across Scotland?

**Richard Lochhead:** The Scottish budget sets out more than £7 billion of capital spending to tackle issues ranging from child poverty to improved infrastructure across the country. Whether by the Scottish Futures Trust or other organisations in Scotland, a lot of work is undertaken to ensure that there is value for money.

There are always external factors that are outwith our control that can influence costs. We have recently seen the inflation crisis and the energy crisis, and there are other factors that can make costs rise unexpectedly for many infrastructure projects, which has serious

implications for the rest of our budgets as a Government. I assure the member that a lot of attention is given to the issue.

### “Quarterly Economic Indicator”

**6. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the latest “Quarterly Economic Indicator” from the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Fraser of Allander Institute, which reportedly shows a business landscape that is characterised by flatlining demand, stalling investment and labour cost pressures. (S6O-04581)

**The Minister for Business (Richard Lochhead):** The Scottish economy is resilient, with gross domestic product strengthening in the three months to January, low unemployment and strong earnings growth. However, we are already seeing the challenging impacts on businesses of the United Kingdom Government's decision to increase employer national insurance contributions. The recent sharp rise in global economic uncertainty and volatility is, as we would all expect, further weighing on the economic outlook.

In responding to those challenges, we continue to work closely with Scottish businesses to ensure that they are well positioned for investment to create jobs and grow the economy.

**Roz McCall:** I thank the minister for his response, but it is a landscape of flatlining demand and things are going in reverse. The latest “Quarterly Economic Indicator” found that business confidence has declined in all sectors in comparison with last year, taxation is the number 1 concern for businesses and labour costs are leading to pressures on operating costs. It also highlighted that Scotland is losing out on major UK contracts and investment opportunities because we simply do not have the workforce to deliver them. That position was backed up by the Confederation of British Industry Scotland, which is requesting that the Scottish Government commits to avoiding further tax divergence from the rest of the UK and to doing more on the Scottish skills shortage.

Does the minister agree with the assessment by the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Fraser of Allander Institute and CBI Scotland of the business landscape? What steps will be taken to support Scotland's businesses?

**Richard Lochhead:** I agree with the member that businesses in Scotland and the wider Scottish economy face many challenges at the moment. As I indicated in my previous answer, global uncertainty and other factors are certainly playing a role in that.



The Fraser of Allander Institute's "Scottish Business Monitor" for quarter 1 of this year says that, in response to the increase in national insurance contributions, almost half of businesses surveyed have increased prices to pass on higher costs to customers, and almost half have reduced hiring or scaled back plans to increase employee headcount.

The member is right that taxation is a big issue, and increases to NI contributions introduced by the UK Government are causing a real headache for the Scottish business community. We also have higher energy costs and other issues.

As outlined in the recent budget that was passed by the Parliament, there are a lot of measures to help the business community in Scotland, not least more than £300 million for enterprise companies. There will be more opportunities for Parliament to have its say on those measures in the coming weeks.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The minister is keen to deflect responsibility for the flatlining of the economy on to others rather than accept his own responsibility. For example, housing policy—including in relation to home energy grants—has resulted in a massive decline in investment. What discussions has the minister had with his colleagues in other departments to make sure that they change their ways to encourage investment?

**Richard Lochhead:** As the member may be aware, in recent weeks, there has been a lot more positive feedback from the Scottish housing sector in response to the changes that have been made by the Scottish Government. We take the issue very seriously. Having a good housing supply in the country is vitally important for the future of our economy, which includes the business community. Many parts of Scotland need more houses to ensure that they can attract skilled workers and that those workers will have somewhere to live. A lot of developments are now under way and there is more positivity in the sector, notwithstanding some of the wider pressures that are facing the economy, which were referred to in previous answers.

### **Green Industrial Strategy (Extended Producer Responsibility)**

**7. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government, regarding the implementation of its green industrial strategy, what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the introduction of extended producer responsibility. (S6O-04582)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** We have been engaging with the UK

Government and with the other devolved Governments to improve the UK-wide scheme, while also exploring new stewardship measures through our circular economy strategy and waste route map.

**Craig Hoy:** Last week, I convened a meeting with industry stakeholders as part of the cross-party group on beer and pubs. They fear that EPR is fast becoming a £1.1 billion tax and regulatory burden that brings risks to a range of sectors, including the glass industry, soft drinks, distilling, hospitality and retail, and that it will ultimately hit consumers and result in increased inflation. There is still no clarity as to how much the producers will ultimately have to pay for EPR waste, the fees for which are vastly more expensive than in other countries such as Ireland, nor how councils will secure the revenues that are generated by it. Will the minister work urgently with other Scottish ministers in the Scottish Government, which forms part of the four-nation working group on EPR, to ensure that those real concerns are heard by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the scheme administrators?

**Kate Forbes:** I am happy to make that commitment to the member and to the stakeholders that he referenced. We will listen carefully to the comments that they make and we will ensure that they are fed back to the UK Government. Craig Hoy has asked a number of portfolio questions in recent weeks on EPR schemes. However, I would be more than happy to look closely at all the specific issues and see what progress can be made on each particular element.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** Acting in line with the polluter pays principle is a key part of enabling a just transition for communities across Scotland through effective waste management and reduction. Will the Deputy First Minister say any more about the Scottish Government's work to achieve that in partnership with Zero Waste Scotland?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Be as brief as possible, Deputy First Minister.

**Kate Forbes:** The polluter pays principle is all about ensuring that producers take greater responsibility for the waste that they create. The introduction of EPR for packaging is intended to shift costs from local authorities to producers, which will generate an estimated £160 million every year. However, we have to make sure that we take people with us and we will consult and listen carefully to stakeholders while raising those issues with the UK Government, as I committed to doing in my earlier answer.

## Tall Ships Races Aberdeen 2025

**8. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with stakeholders regarding the tall ships races Aberdeen 2025. (S6O-04583)

**The Minister for Business (Richard Lochhead):** I am delighted that the Scottish Government, with financial support via VisitScotland, was able to provide the tall ships races Aberdeen 2025 with an award of almost £160,000 to support event delivery costs. VisitScotland staff are represented on the various stakeholder groups that were established to plan and organise the event, including the local organising committee and event co-ordination group. The tall ships races event features prominently in VisitScotland's current and on-going marketing campaign activity.

**Audrey Nicoll:** The tall ships races event is set to be a major event for Aberdeen and the north-east, with projections of around 400,000 visitors and an estimated £30 million boost to the local economy. The event will support businesses across the hospitality, retail and tourism sectors and it will support wider community engagement, such as sail training for young people. Hosting the tall ships will also enhance Aberdeen's international reputation as a vibrant, welcoming city and help to secure a lasting legacy for major events.

Will the minister further outline how the Scottish Government is promoting Scotland's reputation as a leading events destination, maximising the opportunities that are presented by events such as the tall ships races that will ensure a lasting positive impact on the region and across Scotland?

**Richard Lochhead:** The member outlines well the massive benefits for Aberdeen and the north-east from this really exciting event, and I pay tribute to all the people who have played a role in working towards making it such a success. Of course, it brings a big economic benefit to the area as well.

As a minister, I want to play a role in maintaining Scotland's position as a leading events destination. We do a lot to enhance Scotland's reputation as the perfect stage for events, working alongside partners to implement the refreshed national events strategy.

Scotland is the place to be in the coming years. We have the tall ships event in Aberdeen and the Orkney international island games in 2025, the Commonwealth games in 2026, the Tour de France grand depart in 2027 and the Union of European Football Associations European football championship in 2028. The next three years will

be really exciting for the whole country, including the exciting event in Aberdeen.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on Deputy First Minister responsibilities, economy and Gaelic. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item to allow for a changeover of front-bench members.

## Finance and Local Government

### Private Finance Initiative Contracts (East Dunbartonshire Council)

**1. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how much East Dunbartonshire Council has spent on PFI contracts in the last year. (S6O-04584)

**The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** In 2024-25, East Dunbartonshire Council paid £19.6 million in unitary charges for its schools PFI contract. The contract's procurement began in 2005. The capital value of the project was £134 million. However, by the time that the PFI contract concludes in 2038-39, the council will have paid more than £550 million on it.

**Rona Mackay:** Does the minister agree that Labour's PFI legacies and the employer national insurance hike attacks on jobs are placing a burden on councils throughout Scotland?

**Ivan McKee:** Yes, of course I do. That is why, in this year's budget, to help to lessen the burden, we provided local government with one of the largest increases in funding in recent times.

We have always made clear that PFI has not delivered best value for the taxpayer, and that is why we brought it to an end. However, we are, of course, still paying for the legacy of Labour's mistakes.

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** Those members on the Scottish National Party benches who are so keen to point out their contentions with the PFI contracts stay conveniently quiet about their party's repeated historical use of non-profit distributing contracts. Audit Scotland has found that those NPD contracts, which are a type of PFI scheme, turn out to be significantly more expensive to taxpayers than using traditional forms of Government project financing.

What is the current financial burden of NPD contracts to councils across my West Scotland region?

**Ivan McKee:** Pam Gosal is absolutely right: the cheapest way to fund projects is for Governments to borrow. Of course, Scotland has strict limits on how much it can borrow due to the policies of the United Kingdom Government. Were we a normal,

independent country, we would be able to borrow at lower rates to fund capital projects.

On the non-profit distributing programme, the key difference between those programmes and traditional PFIs, which were championed by the Conservative and Labour parties, is that NPD programmes are profit capped and are profit sharing. Those contracts provide greater transparency and more flexibility than PFI and are considerably cheaper.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 2 is from Maggie Chapman, who joins us remotely.

### **Aberdeenshire Council (Finances)**

**2. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Aberdeenshire Council regarding the reported financial pressures that it is experiencing. (S6O-04585)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison):** Ministers and officials regularly meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities to ensure that local government has the capacity and resources that are required to continue to provide communities across Scotland with the high-quality front-line services that they expect and deserve.

**Maggie Chapman:** Tomorrow, people will gather in Fraserburgh to discuss how to prevent proposed council cuts at day centres for disabled people. The proposals would result in provision of day care being limited to severely disabled people, after the council has redefined what counts as severely disabled to reduce eligibility. Transport provision and funding for disabled people to physically get to day care centres might be cut, too, and fees for day care centre places might be increased.

The proposals, and too many others like them, will have devastating effects on the lives of disabled people and their carers. Other services, including the stretched national health service, will have to pick up the pieces. What assurances can the cabinet secretary give to disabled people, their carers and others who are concerned about the proposals, as well as those who will be left to pick up the pieces?

**Shona Robison:** I first say that I understand Maggie Chapman's concern and appreciate the value of day centres and other services for disabled people. Those are proposals by Aberdeenshire Council, but I urge it to listen to the representations that Maggie Chapman has described. We have ensured that Aberdeenshire Council is receiving an extra £42 million, or an additional 7.2 per cent, compared with 2024-25. Taken together with its increase in council tax, that is an additional £58.1 million to support front-line

services in 2025-26. I therefore certainly hope that, as Maggie Chapman has alluded to, the council will listen to those local representations.

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I welcome the fact that this year's Scottish budget provides an increase of more than 7 per cent in funding for Aberdeenshire Council. Will the minister outline how that additional funding should help to alleviate financial pressures for the local authority and provide additional opportunities so that it can improve our communities as a result?

**Shona Robison:** Councils and their employees play a vital role in communities across Scotland, which is why the Scottish Government has made available record funding this year. Although I recognise that significant challenges remain across the public sector, I expect that the additional funding will allow Aberdeenshire Council and other councils to invest in effective, efficient and sustainable local services.

### **Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024**

**3. Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any discussions it has had with the tourism sector and other stakeholders regarding amending the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024. (S6O-04586)

**The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** The Scottish Government receives regular input from the tourism sector regarding the visitor levy, and we are well aware of the sector's concerns with regard to particular aspects of the levy. In March this year, both I and the First Minister spoke and answered questions at the Scottish Tourism Alliance business breakfast, at which the visitor levy was a subject of discussion. In the next couple of weeks, I will meet representatives of the Scottish Tourism Alliance and the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers to discuss those matters further.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** While the Scottish Government continues to prevaricate, councils across Scotland are pushing ahead with consultations on implementing the new tax. However, if Scottish ministers are engaging in good faith with tourism stakeholders and genuinely considering amending the visitor levy, that means that people are being asked to have their say on a levy when they have no idea what the final form might be.

If the Scottish National Party is committed to pushing ahead with the new tax, which many of us continue to oppose, will the minister at least consider calls from the tourism sector, including the Scottish Tourism Alliance, for implementation to be paused for at least six months to allow better time to engage with the sector on potential

improvements, such as introducing a flat fee and reducing further burdens on tourism businesses by removing their role in collecting the new tax?

**Ivan McKee:** As I said, we continue to engage with the sector on the visitor levy, but it is important to recognise that the levy will potentially raise significant amounts of money for local government and certain councils in particular. On the one hand, members on the Conservative benches complain that local government does not have enough funds, but they then complain when we take forward proposals to increase that funding, which does not really stack up. As I said, we are engaging in good faith with the sector to explore how we can take forward the visitor levy and address some of the challenges that the sector has brought before us.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Will the minister please outline what positive conversations the Scottish Government has had with local authorities that plan to introduce a visitor levy in the near future and how it will encourage local authorities to reinvest revenue from the levy in their visitor economies?

**Ivan McKee:** The Scottish Government has had and is having a range of discussions with stakeholders on the implementation of the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024, which requires that a visitor levy scheme's objectives

"must relate to developing, supporting or sustaining facilities or services which are substantially for or used by persons visiting the scheme area".

That measure is welcomed not only by local authorities but by the business community. Although it is for local authorities to determine what they might reinvest the additional revenue in, the act requires them to measure and report on the achievement of the scheme's objectives and publish an annual report, which should set out how much revenue has been collected and how it has been used to support, in particular, the visitor economy.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Will the minister clarify whether the Government is considering delaying the visitor levy's introduction? Would that include a change to the regulations?

**Ivan McKee:** The visitor levy is moving forward, and Daniel Johnson will know that steps are well advanced in Edinburgh to start the implementation of a levy in the middle part of next year. To understand the challenges that the levy is putting on the sector, we are having discussions with a range of stakeholders, and we are keen to explore what actions could be taken to mitigate the challenges wherever possible. Discussions continue with a range of local authorities as well.

## Edinburgh City Plan 2040

**5. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the City of Edinburgh Council regarding the progress of the Edinburgh city plan 2040. (S6O-04588)

**The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** Edinburgh city plan 2040 will be the City of Edinburgh Council's next local development plan, which is at a very early stage in its preparation. We have not discussed it with the council.

On 25 March, I met Edinburgh council's planning convener and its head of planning to discuss matters that are linked to the current city plan, which is Edinburgh city plan 2030. At that meeting, we discussed guidance on developer contributions, an infrastructure levy and future housing delivery in Granton and west Edinburgh.

**Gordon MacDonald:** Many community organisations across the city, such as Wester Hailes Community Trust in my constituency of Edinburgh Pentlands, have produced local place plans for the deadline of August this year, at the cost of great time and expense. What responsibility lies with the local authority to take into consideration those local place plans, which are the aspirations of local communities?

**Ivan McKee:** Local place plans are a positive way for communities to have a stronger voice in how they want their areas to develop. I commend the communities in Gordon MacDonald's constituency for producing those local place plans.

Planning authorities are required by law to take into account any registered local place plan when they are preparing a local development plan. It is for planning authorities to determine what weight and consideration to give to elements of a local place plan, but I encourage them to do so. I am happy to provide Gordon MacDonald and other members with a link to the guidance that is published for communities and planning authorities on local development planning and local place plans, which provides further helpful information.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 is from Jackie Baillie, who joins us remotely.

## Integration Joint Boards (Finances)

**6. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the finance secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding a different model for allocating funding to integration joint boards, in light of a recent Accounts Commission report highlighting the unsustainable gaps in their finances. (S6O-04589)

**The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** We are sympathetic to the fact that the social care sector faces pressures, and we are working to understand the current financial viability picture.

Health and social care services are formally integrated under the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014, which sets in law the requirement for local authorities and health boards to work together and create a health and social care partnership to deliver services. IJBs must receive their delegated budgets via those partners, as direct allocations to IJBs are not possible under the 2014 act. Under current legislation, a different funding model is not possible.

**Jackie Baillie:** The Accounts Commission reported a £560 million deficit in IJB budgets, which is having a hugely damaging impact on some of the most vulnerable people who need social care. Across Scotland, cuts are being made. In my constituency, community link workers are being removed and the work connect project, which provides training and work opportunities for people with learning disabilities, is being closed. Money from IJB reserves was clawed back by the Scottish National Party Government, so IJBs are no longer able to fund critical projects. What comfort can the minister offer to the most vulnerable people in our society who are losing their social care support because of the actions of his Government?

**Ivan McKee:** As Jackie Baillie knows fine well, and as I said in my earlier answer, IJBs are funded directly through health boards and local government in partnership. That is the whole point of the integration of health and social care services under the 2014 act. As she also knows well, the Government has provided health boards and local government with record funding this year to enable them, in turn, to fund IJBs, so that they can provide the services that she talked about. We will continue to engage with partners to understand how the Government can continue to support IJB funding through health boards and local government, as the 2014 act requires.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is a lot of interest in asking supplementary questions. I will try to get everybody in, but questions and answers will need to be brief.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** How much has the Scottish Government increased investment in health and social care integration since 2021-22?

**Ivan McKee:** The 2025-26 budget includes almost £2.2 billion for social care integration. That means that, since 2021-22, the Scottish Government has increased social care investment by almost £1.2 billion, thereby exceeding our

commitment to increase funding by 25 per cent by more than £350 million.

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** IJBs in Scotland clearly face a cash crisis. Yesterday, in evidence to the Finance and Public Administration Committee, the Scottish Fiscal Commission warned of a health and social care budget time bomb, given Scotland's demographics. It warned that an ageing population means that a higher number of people are eligible for care under the current criteria, that those people require more care and that more public spending is therefore needed. Similarly, the SFC's "Fiscal Sustainability Report" warns:

"The growth in health spending shown in our projections is likely to be unsustainable."

Taken alongside a record projected increase in welfare spending, that shows that the Government's whole budget appears to be unsustainable. What is the Government's solution to the sustainability challenge that it faces?

**Ivan McKee:** Wow—I do not know where to start with that question. The Tories want us to cut tax and have less money available to spend, but they are also complaining because health spending is projected to increase. We have kept pace with increases in health spending by providing health boards and local authorities with record funding, so that they, in turn, can fund IJBs. We have done all that while continuing to balance our budget.

There are, of course, longer-term challenges, which we are addressing through our fiscal sustainability delivery plan and our public service reform activity. The Government will continue to provide record funding for health and social care while balancing our budget.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** The Government has been blowing hot and cold on this issue. Today, we have heard very little recognition of the human impact that cuts to IJB funding are having, and Neil Gray has brushed off any suggestion that the Government has a responsibility in that regard.

However, just last month, during First Minister's question time, the First Minister said:

"There will need to be a wider conversation between the Government and the integration joint board to address the concerns that have been properly put to me by members today."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 2025; c 18-19.]

His tone was very open. Does the Government recognise that there would be a broad cross-party welcome if the Government were to accept responsibility for taking forward the wider conversation that the First Minister promised? Will that happen?

**Ivan McKee:** I will let Patrick Harvie know the activity that is taking place in that regard. The Government is very much engaged in such discussions. In February, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, along with representatives from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, invited the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, Scottish Care and the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland to a round-table meeting to discuss the very issue that he talks about—the financial viability of the social care sector. Through that meeting, a response group for financial viability was commissioned to further explore the risks to the sector as well as potential mitigations.

In April, the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport met chairs, chief officers and chief financial officers from all IJBs in Scotland to discuss the financial challenges. That followed a meeting that she had in March. We continue to engage with the sector, and we understand the challenges that it faces, as I outlined in my previous answer.

As I said, we recognise that the funding routes are through health boards and local authorities, which, in turn, have received record funding. However, we also recognise the impact that IJB performance has on local communities and we will continue to engage proactively with the sector and others to be able to address those challenges.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Very briefly, Willie Rennie.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The Government loves round tables and response groups as a response to any particular crisis—and this is a crisis, as people in Fife are desperate for social care but services were slashed and people suffered because of Fife's £37 million overspend last year. When will the Government get a grip of the problem, which is happening year after year?

**Ivan McKee:** As I indicated, we are providing record funding to health boards and local authorities, which in turn have a responsibility to fund IJBs.

As I said, we are also engaging with the sector. Mr Rennie can call it what he likes, but I call it engagement, and at the end of the day, that engagement is hugely important. If we were not engaging, I am sure that he would be one of the first to complain that we were not having those round tables and other discussions to move the challenge forward.

We are having that engagement and we are constructively working with partners to resolve the issue. However, as I said, we have also provided record funding to health boards and local government, which in turn fund IJBs.

### City of Edinburgh Council (Budget)

**7. Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with the City of Edinburgh Council regarding its allocated budget. (S6O-04590)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison):** The Scottish Government routinely engages with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities to cover a range of topics, including current and future budgets.

**Sue Webber:** Thank you for that succinct answer.

Last week, at Edinburgh's housing, homelessness and fair work committee, housing allocations were frozen and now only people with gold priority will be considered for a new council home. All others looking to move home within the city will need to wait even longer.

Edinburgh receives a share of around 6 per cent of the affordable housing budget, using a COSLA-based formula that disadvantages the capital. Meanwhile, the acquisitions budget is allocated based on need, which means that Edinburgh receives more than a third. Will the cabinet secretary urgently review the funding formula to ensure that Edinburgh gets its fair and needed share of moneys?

**Shona Robison:** As other local authorities have done, the City of Edinburgh Council has received an extra £60 million, or an additional 5.9 per cent of funding, compared to 2024-25, and it will receive £73.9 million—an extra £8.1 million—in capital funding.

Sue Webber, in many ways, answered the question herself, because she described the funding formula as being COSLA based. That funding formula is a needs-based formula that is agreed with COSLA on behalf of 32 local authorities each year. If I were to step in and disregard the COSLA agreement, which it arrived at on behalf of 32 local authorities, people would be popping up across the chamber to criticise me for doing so.

I point out to Sue Webber that she cannot support £1 billion of unfunded tax cuts at the same time as calling for more money for the City of Edinburgh Council or anyone else.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Very briefly, Sarah Boyack.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Is the cabinet secretary aware of the cuts that are being made to dozens of vital charities by the Edinburgh integration joint board, which means that the City of Edinburgh Council must now step in to fund those organisations—given the massive pressures

that NHS Lothian is under and our growing population—to keep people well and healthy?

**Shona Robison:** I say to Sarah Boyack that, of course, we understand the pressures on public services, which are felt across these islands because of the demographic challenges that we all understand. However, the Government has given record levels of investment—more than £15 billion—to local government and £21 billion to the national health service and social care. Those are record levels of funding. We expect councils and the health service to ensure that they are adequately funding local services and third sector organisations, which do a very important job.

#### **Employer National Insurance Contributions Increase (Impact on Public Finances)**

8. **Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the potential impact on Scotland's public finances as a result of the United Kingdom Government increasing employer national insurance contributions. (S6O-04591)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison):** The Labour UK Government's hike in employer national insurance contributions adds more than £700 million in costs to the delivery of public services such as the national health service, schools, local government, universities, social care providers and a wide range of third sector organisations.

Despite our calls for full reimbursement, it is clear that the support from the UK Government to meet those costs will fall more than £400 million short of what is required.

**Bob Doris:** I am sure that the cabinet secretary will share my concerns that Labour's brutal employer national insurance contributions increase may risk the financial viability of some businesses and, in doing so, compound the impact on Scotland's public finances. Does she agree that the UK Government must take responsibility for that and appropriately support businesses across Scotland, which are facing very specific UK-created pressures?

**Shona Robison:** Absolutely. In recognition of the damaging implications of that increase for businesses, public services and communities, the Scottish Government has called on the UK Government to reverse it. The increase will, of course, lead to opportunity costs in terms of money that could otherwise have provided the additional funding that Sarah Boyack was calling for, or additional funding for local authorities or the health service. Those opportunity costs are resulting in money for public services going

straight back to the Treasury, and that is totally unacceptable.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on finance and local government. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business to allow front-bench teams to change.

## Grangemouth (Cessation of Refining)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a statement by Kate Forbes on the cessation of refining at Grangemouth. The Deputy First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:51

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** Yesterday's news that Petroineos has now ceased refining at Grangemouth is a devastating blow to Scotland's economy, the workforce and the local community. My thoughts are with all the workers who are impacted as they navigate these difficult times. Although we have anticipated this moment since Petroineos made its decision last September, it is nonetheless a dark moment in Scotland's industrial history.

The Scottish Government has consistently engaged with and supported both Petroineos and its shareholders. Since March 2020, we have worked positively and collaboratively with the business to secure its operations in incredibly challenging situations and to seek to support its transition to other technologies. We have invested more than £6 million over that period directly in Petroineos and its shareholders. We are also ensuring that we support the wider area with investment of a further £81 million through the Falkirk and Grangemouth growth deal, the Grangemouth just transition fund and other activities.

I continue to advocate that the decision of last September was and is premature. It jeopardises our transition to net zero, negatively impacts the Scottish economy and leaves us reliant on imported fuel. We have continually called on the United Kingdom Government to do more to intervene and stop this needless act of economic vandalism. If it can intervene at Scunthorpe, surely it is necessary for it to do so at Grangemouth. The UK Government could have chosen to underpin operations at the refinery to bridge the transition to new technologies or, as we have repeatedly called for, intervened to enable sustainable aviation fuel production at Grangemouth.

However, it is not too late. The UK Government could still choose to intervene at this late stage and deliver a different result. The scale and magnitude of such an intervention would require UK Government involvement—it is not something that the Scottish Government could do alone. At the very least, we need to know and understand what assets at the refinery could potentially be

used to help Grangemouth contribute to our net zero economy in the future.

Yesterday, the Acting Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy wrote to the UK Government to urge it to join her in support for Unite the union's proposal for a review of those assets to inform our work. I reiterate that call and urge the UK Government to get behind that proposal immediately and ensure that we lose no further time. Doing so is critical not only to bringing forward new business, but to ensuring that people who are directly impacted by the decision know that we have their backs.

The workers are at the forefront of our minds. We have not been idly standing by while those highly skilled individuals are put out of work, bringing to their families uncertainty and worry about what comes next. We have already provided £450,000 of funding to support their transition into other roles through a bespoke skills intervention that is being delivered by Forth Valley College. I am pleased that 168 workers are already engaging in retraining activity, and that the majority of the remaining workforce have registered for training that will commence in the coming weeks.

We have prioritised those workers who will be leaving the refinery in the near term to ensure that they are supported and assisted in their transition, and that they are helped to secure other employment and to use their valuable skills to continue to contribute to Scotland's economy.

Although it is regrettable that that intervention has been needed, it is an excellent example of how the Scottish public sector has collaborated with Unite the union to ensure that those workers get the support that they need and deserve. I pay tribute to Unite, which has supported the design and delivery, and now the deployment, of that intervention. Unite's support has been unwavering, and we are grateful for its candour and its efforts to ensure that that provision meets the needs of those individuals.

The voice of workers who have the experience and the expertise will be critical as we seek to secure a long-term and sustainable future for the industrial cluster. Their role and input will continue to be central as we drive forward activity that secures that ambition.

Project willow is being spearheaded by an investment task force that is led by Scottish Enterprise. I am pleased to inform the Parliament that we have seen tangible progress with regard to interested investors and technology providers. As we seek to work with interested parties, the insight of the workforce and Unite will be critical in ensuring that we capitalise on those opportunities.



The Acting Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy received the first progress report from the task force this morning. It is clear that real progress is being made on the outputs from project willow and other associated manufacturing opportunities. Scottish Enterprise is dealing with 66 inquiries, which are aligned with the full range of technologies that are set out in the report, as well as with manufacturing activities that are carried out across the wider cluster. Scottish Enterprise has developed a triage process for assessing those projects quickly, which will lead to due diligence on those that offer the best near-term fit. Scottish Enterprise and my officials are working closely together on activity across the whole cluster, with a view to realising the full potential of the site's transformation.

Scottish Enterprise's approach is not limited to dealing with inbound inquiries; it also includes marketing the Grangemouth opportunity to the world. To that end, Scottish Enterprise is undertaking investor outreach work to attract world-class projects and investors to the site.

Clearly, Petroineos must and will continue to have a critical role to play in the future. The transition of Grangemouth is dependent on Petroineos, as the landowner, acting responsibly. We have engaged positively with the company during its tenure as operator, and I am committed to continuing that. It has given assurances to ministers and officials that it will act as a responsible landlord, and the Government will hold it to that commitment.

Petroineos has not yet committed to making any investment in the projects that are proposed in project willow, but we are engaging with the company and its shareholders to chart a mutually beneficial course that could lead to future investment.

Businesses have made it clear that flexible funding should be made available to support their ambitions, and our recently announced Grangemouth just transition fund will be a key tool in bringing forward future investment at the site.

The early positive progress that Scottish Enterprise has reported has been made has been catalysed by the Government's commitment. However, we cannot do this alone. Although I welcome the £200 million that has been allocated from the national wealth fund, we know that, by its nature, that funding is somewhat restrictive. It does not have the ability to support early-stage technologies that require immediate support. We therefore hope that the UK Government will do more. We call on it to apply the full flexibility of its resources to support investment at Grangemouth. That includes making a timely decision on the Acorn project, which we still await and which is absolutely essential for the future of Grangemouth.

We have repeatedly suggested that the UK Government should make immediately available the whole £10 million that it announced as part of the Falkirk and Grangemouth growth deal, and I reiterate that proposal again today. That would be a tangible start in supporting businesses here in Scotland that need that support now.

I reaffirm the Government's commitment to doing all that we can, within the limited powers that we have, to secure a long-term and sustainable future for Grangemouth. The decision by Petroineos is nothing short of an economic crisis. We need the UK Government to work with us to respond quickly, as we know that it can.

It is a very sad day for Grangemouth and for Scotland. We are deeply sorry for the workers and the wider community. The Government will work tirelessly to secure the future that both the workers and the community of Grangemouth deserve.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The Deputy First Minister will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members who wish to ask a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I thank the Deputy First Minister for sight of her statement before she delivered it in the chamber. This is a dark moment for Grangemouth, for Central Scotland and for Scotland as a whole. The workers and the community in Grangemouth should be at the forefront of our thinking, our words and our actions.

Bluntly, I am deeply concerned that Scottish National Party politicians are playing a constitutional game with the closure of the refinery at Grangemouth. That is not acceptable. The SNP Government cannot escape responsibility by pointing fingers at Westminster. This is the result of years of mixed messages and ideological hostility to Scotland's oil and gas industry from both the SNP and Labour. A presumption against oil and gas has consequences. Instead of politicising this industrial crisis, ministers should focus on clarity and delivery. The people of Grangemouth deserve a straight account of what is happening, not posturing.

I have several questions for the Deputy First Minister. First, has Petroineos given any firm commitment to redeveloping the site? If not, what contingency plans does the Government have in place for redevelopment of the site? Secondly, if Petroineos continues to withhold investment in any of the nine potential project willow projects, does that put any of those projects in jeopardy? Thirdly, does the Scottish Government—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Kerr, I remind you that you had one minute and 30 seconds to speak, as agreed with your party business manager. You have now spoken for one minute and 53 seconds. The Deputy First Minister has already got some questions that she can be getting on with.

**Kate Forbes:** To use Stephen Kerr's words, I believe that my statement was exactly in line with his call for clarity and delivery. That is precisely what I provided in the statement. This is not about pointing fingers; it is about delivery as quickly as possible of jobs and opportunities. Grangemouth has been a key part of our industrial heritage for generations, and it must be the centre point of our industrial future. That is what we intend to deliver through project willow.

Mr Kerr will be pleased to know that I specifically included in my statement answers to some of his specific questions about Petroineos, because I knew that he would ask them. In my statement, I said that Petroineos has not yet committed to making those investments. He asked whether that jeopardised project willow—it does not.

Project willow is all about working with partners. I mentioned that we have had 66 expressions of interest, some of which are in line with project willow. Others are not in line with project willow but could present incredible opportunities. Those potential partners have been attracted by the supportive environment that they have found here in Scotland.

Petroineos has said explicitly to the Government that it will be a responsible landowner and landlord that is supportive of the investment work that needs to happen. I hope that that has answered Mr Kerr's questions.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Yesterday will have been an incredibly difficult day for the hundreds of workers at Grangemouth and for the wider community. They are right to ask what actions their Governments have taken.

Within months of taking office, the UK Labour Government committed £200 million of investment for Grangemouth's industrial future. Unfortunately, that contrasts with the Scottish Government's actions. The SNP Government was made aware by Petroineos five years ago that refining was under threat. The Deputy First Minister therefore has to answer this question: in that time, did any one of the five different cabinet secretaries responsible develop any real plans for the refinery's future?

Today, the Deputy First Minister strongly hints at nationalisation, although she stops short of calling for it. Did her Government ever raise that with the previous Conservative Government or with

Petroineos? Indeed, has the Government ever asked its civil servants to consider such options? In the dozens of meetings that the Scottish Government has had with the new UK Labour Government in recent months, has it once raised the topic? If the cabinet secretary cannot point to that evidence, are people not right to conclude that the Scottish Government is producing that option at the last minute to turn this devastating event into a political football, and are they not right—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Johnson.

**Daniel Johnson:** —to conclude that the SNP Government has done nothing in the last—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have had your allocated time of 1 minute—thank you, Mr Johnson.

**Kate Forbes:** Knowing, also, what Daniel Johnson might ask, I included the answer in my statement up front: I said very clearly that, since March 2020, we have worked with the business, investing in excess of £6 million over that period. July 2021, July 2022, August 2023, July 2024 and August 2024 are all examples of when the Government has worked collaboratively with Petroineos and shareholders to consider options for their future. I can assure the Parliament that this Government has been actively at work to secure the future of this key industrial asset.

Daniel Johnson mentioned the nature of our conversations with the UK Government. As we have said repeatedly, we believe that we should leave no stone unturned to secure the future of Grangemouth—that was the case, first, with the Conservative Government and then with the Labour Government. I am young enough to remember when Labour promised that, if it were elected, it would save the plant.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** The Grangemouth refinery closure means that 430 workers have been made redundant. My thoughts are with every single one of them and their families. They have been let go by Petroineos and let down after Scottish Labour's pledge that it

"would step in and save the jobs".

UK Labour was able to underwrite a loan guarantee for a plant in Antwerp, to step in and save British Steel in Scunthorpe, to nominate sustainable aviation fuel sites anywhere but Scotland and to progress with carbon capture and storage in Teesside and Humberside. Even the local Labour MP concedes that Westminster treats Scotland as an afterthought. We need our Scottish Government to work hard to replace jobs as soon as possible.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could I have a question, please, Ms Thomson?

**Michelle Thomson:** Small and medium-sized enterprises are among the most innovative companies in the energy sector, but often they do not operate at the scale required to access the available finance, such as from the national wealth fund.

The Deputy First Minister mentioned the role of Scottish Enterprise so—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Thomson, I need a question, please.

**Michelle Thomson:** —what actions is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that it is given a fair hearing, given the likelihood that it is able to create quality jobs at scale?

**Kate Forbes:** The member is absolutely right to talk about the innovation of SMEs. We now have a system, led by Scottish Enterprise, that triages all inquiries that reach it from SMEs and other companies and investors that want to be part of Grangemouth's future. I mentioned the 66 inquiries, and Michelle Thomson and I separately met representatives of one such interested company this morning. The innovation coming from those investors and developers that I am hearing about is extraordinary.

We have previously talked about the fact that project willow will be spread over a number of years, but some opportunities can be accelerated, because they are ready to go. We are committed to ensuring that companies can access units, relocate to Grangemouth and start to employ people as quickly as possible.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Underpinning project willow is the need to have an energy strategy, which would provide some clarity. Where is it? When will it be published? Does the Government realise that getting that wrong and leaving in the presumption against new oil and gas could mean Grangemouth-equivalent redundancies every week from now until 2030?

**Kate Forbes:** I do not know to whom the member is talking, but if he thinks that all that it takes is an energy strategy to attract investment to Grangemouth, he is speaking to the wrong people. We are ensuring that there is funding available—£25 million—and that we have a clear process for taking inquiries, triaging them and supporting companies to relocate, and ultimately for delivering the employment that we want in order to ensure that Grangemouth continues to play a key part in our industrial future.

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** Jobs and livelihoods are being lost as we speak in the chamber today, which is placing workers and their families in an extremely difficult situation. Alongside that, we are losing important skills and

knowledge from the workforce, which could be lost to Scotland for the foreseeable future. Such skills and knowledge will be critical in helping to deliver nine of the key areas that were identified in project willow in the medium to longer term. What priority has been given to securing investment in the short term that will help to maintain and support those critical skills and knowledge in the Grangemouth area?

**Kate Forbes:** The member is absolutely right that we need to retain the skills and the knowledge, and he will be aware that it is those skills and that knowledge that are of particular interest to potential investors. Some of the expressions of interest that have reached me, which I know have come via the member, are short term—in other words, those investors are willing to relocate or set up a new facility in the Grangemouth area quite rapidly. We want to work at pace to ensure that they can do that and thereby retain the skills and the knowledge on the site.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Having attended both project willow briefings, I agree with the need for urgent action. Can the Deputy First Minister give us a timescale for the Scottish Government's delivery of the regulatory changes to enable the use of Scottish deposit return scheme waste resources, bioresources and agriculture and forestry resources, which are critical for the development of sustainable aviation fuel and the hydroprocessed esters and fatty acids—HEFA—process?

**Kate Forbes:** I thank the member for that point, because she is absolutely right that this is not just about funding—it is also about regulatory changes. She will perhaps be aware from previous answers that I have given that that is one of the areas that we are trying to accelerate with the UK Government, by working together to accelerate such changes. That is not entirely within my gift, and we need to work collectively with the UK Government on that, but from our perspective, all of that is to be done as quickly as possible.

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** This is another example of successive London-based Governments snubbing Scotland. The Acorn project at St Fergus in my constituency, which was delayed again and again, was key to Grangemouth, and now that project is in jeopardy. That is a disgrace. While billions of pounds are found for projects in England, Scotland is left behind. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, given the implications for industry and the just transition for both Grangemouth and the north-east, Acorn must be an immediate priority?

**Kate Forbes:** There is absolutely no doubt that the development of Acorn is vital to support the decarbonisation of Scotland's industry and the

future of industries at Grangemouth and across Scotland. We urgently need clarity on the Acorn project; we have been waiting for that clarity for an awfully long time. We need the UK Government to confirm the track 2 status at the earliest opportunity and provide funding for the Acorn project, to end the uncertainty and give even more momentum to the opportunities in and around Grangemouth.

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** Although the retraining project is very welcome and I am glad that Unite has been so engaged, the gap between the end of refining and what comes next on the site currently seems to be unknown. The Deputy First Minister referred to Unite's ask for an audit of the assets, but in addition, we need to find out how long it may take to decommission any parts of the refinery in order to ensure that we lose as few skills as possible from the area. Does the Deputy First Minister have any assurances from the operator on the timeframe for how long it will take to prepare the site to enable other industries to use it?

**Kate Forbes:** There are a number of points. First, we want to shrink the gap by accelerating opportunities. With regard to the audit, the letter on that was sent just this morning or last night, and I will update the member as soon as I have a clearer answer.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I thank the Deputy First Minister for advance sight of her statement. I, too, associate myself with her comments about the workers, their families and the community at this difficult time.

Many of the workers at the refinery will be looking for more secure work. We have a shortage of skilled workers in many sectors, as other members have highlighted. I note the training programmes, but does the Deputy First Minister have an understanding of how many of those skilled workers plan to remain in Scotland, so that we do not lose their skills to other countries?

**Kate Forbes:** I mentioned the funding that the Government has invested. We are working with the wider workforce across the entire industrial cluster. The member is right to say that, at a time when we have a skills shortage, which is indicative of the pace of growth across some of our industries, the skills and knowledge that Grangemouth workers have are in high demand. We are committed to supporting the retraining effort. Clearly, we want to retain all those workers, and we are working as hard as possible to do that.

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** Project willow confirmed that one option for the future of Grangemouth was the production of sustainable aviation fuel, which the Westminster Government has spent £50 million on to benefit

Teesside. Has the cabinet secretary had any engagement with the UK Labour Government about SAF investment for Grangemouth in Scotland? Does she share my concern that Westminster has focused solely on the development of sustainable aviation fuel south of the border and that, once again, Scotland has been treated as an afterthought?

**Kate Forbes:** We have been calling for more investment, and specifically more flexible forms of investment, from the UK Government, but we will also require more than investment. Project willow clearly states that we need UK ministers to think about the regulatory landscape and, in particular, the recommendations on the HEFA pathway, which recommends a delay to the implementation of the HEFA cap and an exemption for domestic feedstocks, alongside consideration of oil-based cover crops as an eligible feedstock under the SAF mandate. I have gone into that level of detail because we need clarity on both. We want decisive action to be taken so that there is a sufficient incentive for sustainable aviation fuel production in Scotland as well as what is progressing at pace in Teesside.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** We need to avoid future closures in the energy sector after refining at Grangemouth comes to an end. Gary Smith from the GMB union has described Labour's decision not to grant new licences for oil and gas extraction in the North Sea as "absolute madness". The Scottish Government is very coy about where it stands. Can the Deputy First Minister clearly say whether the Scottish Government supports the granting of new licences for projects such as Rosebank—yes or no?

**Kate Forbes:** I think that the Scottish Government has been crystal clear that we need energy security to be prioritised and that we need the right energy mix to ensure that we have that security. More than anything else, people in Scotland want cheaper energy bills. The member started his question by talking about industrial failings. He will know that the high cost of energy is nearly always cited as a reason for that. If we want a sustainable industrial base across Scotland, we need to reduce the cost of energy so that it is competitive with energy charges across Europe and further afield.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** We cannot sit back and watch another economic crisis unfold in Scotland because of Westminster inaction. Can the Deputy First Minister speak further about what steps the Scottish Government is taking to help to preserve the skills of Grangemouth's workforce as we continue our just transition?

**Kate Forbes:** We have worked with Forth Valley College to assess the training needs of

those who have lost their jobs and to deliver tailored reskilling to support their future employment. We value those highly skilled workers and the contribution that they can bring to realising the potential of project willow and the wider opportunities across the cluster. The skills intervention is being delivered in consultation with Skills Development Scotland, Unite the union and the UK Government to ensure that we support the retention of those skills.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I remind members of my voluntary register of trade union interests.

Given that Petroineos has stated that it will not take forward any of the nine proposals in project willow, what contact, if any, has Scottish Enterprise had with new, serious potential investors? If there have been 66 related inquiries, how many of those will generate jobs, in what, and—critically—when?

**Kate Forbes:** Of the 66 inquiries, which reach across the Grangemouth cluster, seven are willow technology-fit projects; 14 are non-willow technology-fit projects; three do not fit directly within willow projects, although we are still supporting any expressions of interest; one is an innovation project; and 41 are classified in other places in terms of different services, supply chain inquiries and so on. We have that granular level of detail, which allows us to triage an inquiry to understand what a business needs in order to progress—for some, it might be a site, and for others, it might be something else. Once we have identified that, we work round the clock to provide the support to accelerate any expressions of interest.

As has been said, because we know that skills and knowledge are one of the aspects that those companies are most interested in, we want to ensure that, where there is interest, we can move at pace, so that people are re-employed as quickly as possible and the gap is shrunk.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the statement. To allow front-bench teams to change positions, there will be a short pause before we move to the next item of business.

## Motorists

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-17362, in the name of Sue Webber, on ending the war against Scotland's motorists. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak button now.

15:22

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** The Scottish Conservatives will always stand up for motorists, unlike the left-wing parties in this chamber, who continue to treat them with disdain. For too long, road users in this country have faced punitive and ill-considered measures that do little to support our economy, communities or environment in a fair and effective way.

Motorists are not the enemy. They are parents doing school runs, workers getting to jobs, tradespeople running businesses and carers reaching the most vulnerable. They are ordinary people going about their everyday lives.

Motorists are essential to Scotland's economy and crucial for our connectivity, but they are being punished by the Scottish National Party Government through punitive low-emission zones, controlled parking zones, botched disincentives to car use, endless road works and a constant battle against pothole-ridden roads. Further, there are now the SNP's ludicrous plans for a 50mph national speed limit.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Will Sue Webber take an intervention?

**Sue Webber:** If Mr Cole-Hamilton does not mind, I will come to him in a second, once I have got a bit more traction.

Despite what the SNP says in its amendment, it is not an exaggeration to describe the situation as a war against motorists. Cars remain the most popular form of transport in Scotland, but hard-working Scots feel that they are increasingly treated as an afterthought. That is what people tell me—this is how they feel—about relentless policies that make their lives harder and more expensive without a feasible alternative being available.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Liberal Democrats believe that we should incentivise people to get out of cars and into public transport, but we agree that we need to improve Scotland's road network, not least to Inverness and the far north, including the A9, the A96 and the A82. I was surprised to see no mention of those main infrastructure projects in the Conservative motion. Is that an omission?

**Sue Webber:** It is not an omission, Mr Cole-Hamilton. The point is about roads across the country generally. We did not want to specify and single out individual roads because we wanted to make the debate relevant to all of Scotland and not just those who rely on some of our rural connectivity.

The insidious drip-drip effect of anti-car policies is hampering our economy and connectivity, and punishing Scots who are already hard pressed. The SNP must stop viewing car drivers as bogeymen and end its war on Scotland's motorists by moving away from those damaging policies. After all, the SNP scrapped its target to reduce car use by 20 per cent by 2030 after Audit Scotland said that there was no costed delivery plan or clear milestones. That is a stark admission of failure, but one that was entirely foreseeable. The Audit Scotland report confirmed what many of us suspected: that there was no costed delivery plan, no measurable milestones and no realistic understanding of how such a dramatic reduction could be achieved without crippling those who rely on cars daily.

What we need is a pragmatic shift in approach—no more fines, zones or restrictions. We should be encouraging positive change, through investment in electric vehicle infrastructure; incentives for greener choices, including public transport and park and rides; and proper road maintenance that makes driving safer and more efficient, not more difficult.

SNP ministers need to show some common sense and focus on incentives rather than penalties to encourage motorists to be part of an affordable transition.

The implementation of low-emission zones has hindered businesses, residents and motorists in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee. Fines in Glasgow and Edinburgh are extremely punitive, starting at £60 and doubling with each repeat offence, up to a cap of £480 per day. That places a disproportionate burden on low-income drivers who cannot afford to replace older vehicles. The reality is that the low-emission zones have cost more than £13 million of taxpayers' money to set up in Scotland but are making a minimal difference to air quality. It is important that ministers review their effectiveness before any new zones are proposed or the current ones are expanded, and we must reconsider the punitive fines.

Unbelievably, the SNP has spent three years and £500,000 of taxpayers' money on its plan to cut national speed limits on single-carriageway roads from 60mph to 50mph, yet there is no clear evidence that a blanket reduction would deliver significant safety benefits. Such a reduction would impact commuters and significantly impact the

agriculture, haulage and logistics sectors across Scotland, placing further strain on productivity.

Scotland's road network is in a state of steady decline, and motorists are paying the price. Almost 500,000 potholes have been reported to Scottish local authorities since 2021, and Edinburgh has been named as Scotland's pothole capital, with more potholes than Aberdeen, Dundee and Glasgow put together.

Resurfacing rather than refilling is the best solution to tackle Scotland's pothole problem. That is obvious when we consider that almost half a billion pounds has been spent on fixing potholes since 2022, yet our roads are still in a terrible condition. That must be backed by a more co-ordinated effort among the Scottish Government, the Office of the Scottish Road Works Commissioner, local authorities and utility companies.

Too often, road works sites sit idle, causing needless congestion and frustration. When one utility company has finished, it is often only a few weeks, sometimes days, before the next company comes in and digs up exactly the same stretch of road. No wonder it is frustrating for residents and drivers. Ministers must seek ways to discourage inactivity on road works sites and to incentivise finishing road works ahead of time.

Finally, we are calling for greater action to future proof Scotland's electric vehicle charging network. "Just Transition: A Draft Just Transition Plan for Transport in Scotland" acknowledges that increasing EV car ownership alone is not enough. The charging infrastructure must be put in place if more people are to start using EVs. Motorists cannot be expected to shift to EVs without confidence that charging is accessible, affordable and convenient. I am an EV user, but charging issues were the biggest barrier when making the choice to get an EV. That is the case for many people, especially those who do not have home charging and who rely on the public charging network. Our charging network has different kilowatt chargers, all with differing fees and differing penalties for overstaying. Those factors are contingent on the decisions that are taken by local authorities.

We have lodged a motion that calls on the SNP to finally end the war on motorists. Its anti-car policies are damaging our economy and punishing hard-pressed Scots.

I move,

That the Parliament calls on the Scottish Government to take greater action to support Scotland's motorists and to cease implementing punitive measures against road users, which have been described as a war on Scotland's motorists; recognises the importance of motorists to the Scottish economy and connectivity; acknowledges that the Scottish Government has abandoned its plans to reduce

car use by 20% by 2030 and welcomes the recent Audit Scotland report that states that the Scottish Ministers had “no costed delivery plan or measurable milestones” to achieve this target; calls on the Scottish Ministers to focus on incentives, rather than penalties, to encourage motorists to change their behaviour as part of an affordable transition; notes that the implementation of low emission zones has hindered businesses and motorists in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee, and calls on ministers to review the effectiveness of low emission zones before any new zones are proposed, or the current ones are expanded, and to reconsider the punitive fines; recognises that road users in Aberdeen have been hindered by the introduction of bus gates, and that motorists across Scotland have been restricted by the expansion of parking charges; urges the Scottish Ministers not to introduce 50 mph speed limits on national speed limit single carriageway roads; recognises that resurfacing, rather than refilling, is the best solution to tackle Scotland’s pothole problem; urges ministers to work more effectively with the Scottish Road Works Commissioner, local authority road works coordinators and utility companies to encourage less inactivity on road work sites and to incentivise finishing works ahead of time; calls for greater action to futureproof Scotland’s EV charger network, and further calls on the Scottish Government to recognise the vital role that motorists play in Scotland.

15:29

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** I thank colleagues for the opportunity to set out to Parliament the importance and the impact of our policies and investments relating to road users, infrastructure and wider sustainable transport.

The language of a “war on Scotland’s motorists” is used out of context to maximise political traction. Failing to consider the sensitivities of such language is reckless, given the wider global considerations. I genuinely urge members to consider that during our deliberations today.

The First Minister has spoken about the dangers of the pushback against the climate crisis and the need for unity to make a renewed case for climate action. Talking about a “war” on motorists unfortunately falls into that trap.

**Sue Webber:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Jim Fairlie:** I will take it in a second. I hope that we can reset the level of our discussion in order to find a solution that we can all agree to work on.

**Sue Webber:** Can the minister refer to anything that I said in my remarks today that did not acknowledge that motorists want to be part of an affordable transition?

**Jim Fairlie:** I am talking about the language that was used in the motion bringing the debate to the Parliament in the first place.

I recognise the fundamental importance of our roads and their users to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Scotland. That

includes drivers—who I hope will drive more electric vehicles—and public transport users. The Conservatives’ deregulation of bus services in the 1980s and 1990s has resulted in decades of decline, meaning that there is no viable public transport provision in many communities, especially in rural areas. Poll after poll demonstrates that people want access to high-quality and affordable transport. They want to reduce their travel costs, they want to take climate action and they want sustainable alternatives to car use. I believe that that is the case among members across the chamber.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** There was a discussion at the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee meeting this week on what more the Scottish Government could do to ensure that we have reliable and affordable bus services. Will the minister talk about what the Government will actually do?

**Jim Fairlie:** I will try to come to that as I make my way through my speech.

We all accept that we want to have alternatives to car use; as I said, I think that that is what all of us across the chamber want. We need to reduce carbon emissions from transport—especially from car use. The Scottish Government remains committed to reducing Scotland’s reliance on cars and encouraging a shift towards public transport and active travel, alongside a switch to electric vehicles.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Jim Fairlie:** Let me finish the point that I am making. Scotland reached its target of 6,000 public EV charge points two years early through a combination of Scottish Government funding, local authority delivery and private sector investment. Approximately 24,000 additional public charge points will be delivered by 2030 through continued Scottish Government funding and increasing private sector investment.

**Liam Kerr:** Does the minister regret the failure of all the ministers who came before him to set out a costed delivery plan and milestones to reduce car use by 20 per cent by 2030, and will he set that out?

**Jim Fairlie:** It is not a case of regretting what other ministers have done. I am standing here today as the minister who is contributing to the debate that has been brought before us.

I recognise that supporting electric car use contributes to Scotland’s connectivity, which benefits the economy, education, social mobility and leisure right across Scotland. We support meeting environmental challenges with regard to emissions. There is also a role for the United

Kingdom Government, which could reduce the VAT rates that are paid on public charging points to 5 per cent to help to support an equitable and just transition for those who cannot charge electric vehicles at home.

Bus connectivity is being further enhanced by free bus travel for more than 2 million people in Scotland, which provides an alternative for those who can make the switch to public transport. Although I have noted the historical decline in buses, they still account for the vast majority of public transport journeys, with around 334 million journeys made annually. Responsibilities for local road provision and some local bus services lie with local transport authorities, which will be able to have more control through transport legislation that puts more power into their hands.

The low-emission zones that Sue Webber mentioned are key to improving air quality, protecting public health and encouraging more sustainable transport options, and they have been implemented in more than 320 cities across Europe. In Glasgow, where a low-emission zone has been in place since 2023, air quality benefits are already being accrued, as the average nitrogen dioxide levels in the zone are down by approximately 20 per cent compared with 2022.

The Scottish Government welcomes the independent role of the Scottish road works commissioner. However, we have concerns that the punctuality of bus services is being hampered by road works. I have met the road commissioner to discuss the concerns that have been raised by bus operators. I have also met the bus operators and I am meeting local authorities. I intend to continue that collective conversation so that we can find solutions. I will continue to engage collaboratively with the Scottish road works commissioner and the road works industry to find reasonable solutions to help in that area, which include incorporating bus data into the Scottish road works register and providing more consideration of bus services—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, I ask you to bring your remarks to a close and to move your amendment, please.

**Jim Fairlie:** —and the code of practice for co-ordination of road works.

Presiding Officer, I will finish my remarks there.

I move amendment S6M-17362.4, to leave out from first “calls” to end and insert:

“believes that language used out of context to maximise political traction and which fails to consider the sensitivities of such language is reckless, given wider global considerations; further believes that demonising car users is unhelpful to rural communities in particular, which, as a result of a deregulated bus market, often have no alternative to using a car; acknowledges, however, that

Scotland needs to reduce carbon emissions from transport, especially from car use; welcomes that Scotland has reached its target of 6,000 public EV charge points two years early through a combination of Scottish Government funding, delivery by local authorities and private sector investment, with approximately 24,000 to be delivered by 2030 through continued Scottish Government funding and increasing private sector investment; recognises that supporting EV car use contributes to Scotland’s connectivity, and further recognises the value that connectivity has in helping to support the economy, education, social mobility and leisure across Scotland; notes that connectivity is being enhanced by free bus travel for over two million people in Scotland, which provides alternatives to car usage for those that can make the switch; respects the responsibilities of local authorities for local road provision and maintenance, and some local bus services, and that they will be able to have more control through transport legislation, which puts more power into the hands of local transport authorities; is concerned at the ongoing impact of UK Conservative administrations’ deregulation of bus services in the 1980s and 1990s; recognises the need for safe, clean and, importantly, reliable punctual bus services, which can be improved through bus infrastructure, and that improvements can be made in public health by creating low emission zones, as has been done in over 40 areas across Europe, but does have concerns that the punctuality of bus services can be hampered by road works; welcomes the Scottish Government’s approach through engaging collaboratively with the Scottish Road Works Commissioner, who oversees road works, with roads authorities, which have responsibility for coordination of works, and with the road works industry, which is responsible for duration and quality of works, to find reasonable solutions to help in this area; agrees that further investigation is needed of the role that those undertaking the works play in the quality of road surfaces after works have been completed; further agrees to await the results of the National Speed Management Review consultation, noting that an estimated 10mph reduction in the national speed limit on single carriageway roads can reduce deaths by 23% and serious casualties by 18%, and that there is a need to make Scotland’s roads safer to cut the number of people being injured and killed on the roads, and welcomes the roll-out of 20mph limits across all local authorities on roads determined by them.”

15:35

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** We are having a very short debate that is attempting to cover many aspects of transport policy. We have already heard from the Conservative spokesperson and the Government minister, who have given an overview of some of the key dividing lines that the Tory motion is trying to create.

Parts of the Conservative motion are worth considering: the problematic implementation of the LEZ in Glasgow, the state of Scotland’s roads and the cost to motorists of potholes. However, it is a stretch to describe the environment as a “war” on motorists and to seek to create division on an issue on which we, as a Parliament, are agreed: the need to reduce emissions to improve air quality and meet our climate change targets.



The motion refers to road users solely as motorists, but bus passengers, cyclists and pedestrians all use roads. Its car-centric focus does not recognise the need to balance the needs of all road users and reduce the reliance on the personal car.

The Government's dropping of the target to reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent car is a disappointment. It was an empty promise, which was not backed up by the leadership or the action that would be required to achieve it, as Audit Scotland has made clear. It is not enough just to set targets without any way to reach them, a costed delivery plan, measurable milestones or the governance in place to track progress. To tackle the climate crisis and transform our transport system, we need the headline to be backed up with work that will make it a reality.

Transport remains our single largest source of emissions, but rather than a reduction in car use, we have seen record levels of vehicle ownership and an increase in kilometres driven. The key to reducing car use is ensuring that people have transport choices, and that means an awareness of the reality of the choices and the limits that people face.

According to the Scottish household survey, a quarter of our households do not have access to a car, and that figure rises significantly in our cities and among lower-income households. For those people, public transport is not an option; it is a vital service that allows them to live their lives. However, under the Scottish Government, bus routes have been axed, rail fares have been increased and users of ferry services have endured chaos.

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** Is the member aware that many bus companies are facing extreme financial pressures as a result of the Labour UK Government's imposition of increased employer national insurance contributions? That is resulting in increased fares, a reduction in services and disinvestment in the bus fleet. What does she say to the Labour Government about the impact of that, which will undoubtedly affect bus services in Scotland?

**Claire Baker:** The member will probably agree that the decline in bus services in Scotland happened long before Labour came into government. For years under the SNP, we have seen a reduction in the bus routes that are available to communities and more people do not have access to a bus. I do not accept the argument that has been put forward.

We recognise that people are often too reliant on cars to get to where they need to be. Public transport links are lacking and, without private car transport, some people would be cut off. Part of

that is a failure to invest in regional solutions, and some bus networks have been dismantled as local authority funding has been hollowed out. We need to look at how to ensure more local involvement in delivering bus services for those areas.

**Jim Fairlie:** Will the member give way?

**Claire Baker:** I am quite pressed for time, but I will do so if the minister can be very brief.

**Jim Fairlie:** On the member's point about certain areas not having bus services, is that not more to do with the fact that it is a deregulated market? In addition, irrespective of how much public money we put in, we have no control at all over timetables or fares.

**Claire Baker:** I agree with what the Government's amendment says about deregulation and the impact that that has had. However, the SNP Government has done little to reverse that. Legislation was introduced, but we have seen no activity because of a lack of funding in local authority areas to progress that agenda, which is something that I think that we agree on.

We need to look at how to ensure more local involvement in delivering bus services for those areas so that alternatives to the car are being provided. However, when the car is the only option, we need to work to reduce reliance on it. Concessionary travel schemes encourage the use of public transport, particularly buses, for certain groups. However, to persuade more people out of cars, public transport has to be reliable, affordable and accessible. That is why Scottish Labour has pledged to remove peak fares for good as the first step in delivering a fairer pricing structure, which would mean that more people could afford to use public transport and that it would be competitively priced compared to driving, particularly when a family is travelling.

The reality is that price increases are pushing people into cars. We need to foster an environment where the car is not the default. We need to not just make it feasible to choose an alternative method; we need to make that a positive choice. That means not adding significant costs, in terms of money or time.

Part of that is about addressing the crumbling road network that is a result of the long-term underfunding of local authorities. The issue of potholes has already been covered. As a member of the cross-party group on music, I point out that the implementation of the LEZ scheme in Glasgow has been difficult for the night-time economy there.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Baker will need to conclude and move her amendment.

**Claire Baker:** I will just say something about electric cars. We need to do more to increase the attraction of electric cars.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I ask Ms Baker to move her amendment.

**Claire Baker:** We need to do more to make sure that we have a transport strategy that works for all our communities.

I move amendment S6M-17362.1, to leave out from first “calls” to end and insert:

“highlights the Scottish Government's dropping of the target of a 20% reduction in car use by 2030 and the recent Audit Scotland report, which states that the Scottish Ministers had 'no costed delivery plan or measurable milestones' to achieve this target; recognises that, while car ownership has increased, many households, including a greater proportion of those on lower incomes, do not have access to a car; further recognises that a failure to reduce transport emissions will have a detrimental effect on the climate and on people's health; acknowledges that a reduction in car use is only realistic and inclusive if there is a viable alternative option, and calls on the Scottish Government to scrap peak rail fares as a first step to making public transport more affordable and accessible to all.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We are a bit pressed for time this afternoon. I call Mark Ruskell to open on behalf of the Scottish Greens.

15:40

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** It is clear that there is no war on the motorist, and it is a bit silly to suggest that there is. However, I absolutely think that, every single day, motorists face congestion misery on our roads, so we should be tackling congestion. We can do that only when the costs of public transport fall relative to those of the private car and when better reliability, punctuality and frequency make bus and rail the natural choice for commuters, where they have that choice available.

Facts are really important in this debate. I ask members to reflect on the fact that, since the Parliament was established, the number of cars on the roads has increased by 38 per cent and mileage has gone up by 16 per cent, while the cost of motoring has decreased by 19 per cent, rail fares have increased by 31 per cent and bus and coach fares have risen by an eye-watering 102 per cent in real terms. It is clear that successive Governments have prioritised car dependency, and that people who choose or rely on public transport are continually being disadvantaged by Government policy.

Transport is the biggest climate polluter, and private cars pollute the most. Actions are needed to reduce private car usage and demand—otherwise, other parts of our economy will have to pick up more of the burden in getting to net zero. A traffic reduction target, backed by deliverable actions, is needed now more than ever. Dropping the 20 per cent target is a real backwards step that sends out the wrong message, removes the focus

and undermines the partnership action that is needed on the ground to prioritise public transport and active travel.

**Jim Fairlie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mark Ruskell:** If there is time in hand, I would welcome that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is very limited time.

**Mark Ruskell:** Okay—very briefly.

**Jim Fairlie:** Does the member not accept that the target was dropped because it was absolutely unachievable? Does he accept that the new guidance is clear that only a 7 per cent reduction is needed, and that we are working to bring together the kinds of initiatives that will allow us to do what all members in the chamber want to achieve?

**Mark Ruskell:** I ask the minister to reflect on what Duncan Cameron from FirstGroup told Parliament just yesterday. He said that dropping the 20 per cent target represents a huge missed opportunity. There was an opportunity for partnership action and to have a clear focus.

Targets without measurable actions are doomed to fail. Despite the fact that a draft route map to reduce congestion was published jointly with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities three years ago, the plan is yet to be agreed. When the plan comes back to COSLA at the end of this week, it will be gutted and all the meaningful action will be taken out of it. All the actions that local authorities such as the City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow City Council want to put in place to start to tackle congestion and deliver investment will be left out of the plan.

We need to reflect on the fact that progress on road charging has been absolutely non-existent in Scotland. We are 22 years on from the introduction of the congestion charge in London, which is now just accepted as part of everyday life and which raises significant revenue for public transport investment. It is time to support local authorities that want to introduce road user charging, such as those in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

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

**Mark Ruskell:** No. I do not have any time—sorry.

We need to deliver the right models for those local authorities to cut congestion and raise money. Encouraging people to choose to leave the car at home is not only good for the climate; it is about cleaner air and safer streets, a healthier society and a stronger economy. There is lots of

evidence from around the world—including from Europe and other cities across the UK—on where reducing road congestion has been beneficial for the economy. However, we need champions to lead the debate with facts. We need a cross-party effort, not just here at Holyrood but at Westminster and in our town halls.

The issue is also about fairness. Car-dependent transport systems drive economic and socioeconomic inequalities. One in five households in Scotland does not have access to a car. Car use is lower among women, disabled people and older people, and those groups are likely to rely more on public transport. Simply pointing to a growing number of EV charging points really patronises the people who cannot drive.

We can do better. The Government needs to empower the councils that are ready and willing to take action now to create vibrant and inclusive places where the car is the guest and communities can grow and thrive.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call on Alex Cole-Hamilton to open on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

15:45

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak for the Liberal Democrats in this debate. Liberal Democrats are certainly committed to tackling the climate crisis while building healthier and more connected communities. Those are not mutually exclusive—two things can be true at the same time—and some of our communities, as I alluded to in my intervention on Sue Webber, are not connected in the way that we would like them to be, which is a Government failure.

There is no question but that reducing the number of cars on the road cuts carbon emissions, improves air quality and reduces congestion, while making our towns and rural communities safer and more pleasant places to live. At the same time, it is important that public transport and active travel are realistic, accessible alternatives. Too often in Scotland, travelling by car is cheaper and easier than public transport, which is completely the wrong way round. We will not make any progress while that remains the case.

We need local bus and rail networks to be fit for purpose and affordable, but the Government has presided over fewer and fewer public transport journeys each consecutive year, particularly in left-behind rural and semi-rural areas where people often have no option other than a car. It is right that we encourage active travel by creating safe, direct walking and cycling routes, which mean that more people feel able to leave their cars at home,

whether that is for the school run, daily commute or trip to the shops. It is a win-win for cutting pollution, promoting tourism and improving people's health.

However, I understand the frustration that communities feel, especially when they are affected by measures without having any say on them. We need to win hearts and minds.

I am a massive fan of the idea of low-traffic neighbourhoods. I am really interested in what has happened in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, but I am also interested in the five layers of consultation that were behind that. The City of Edinburgh Council tried to impose a low-traffic neighbourhood on my community of East Craigs during the pandemic without consulting people in the 7,000 homes that would have been affected, which really set back hearts and minds.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I am afraid that I need to make progress. Forgive me—I have only four minutes.

By doing that, the council set back the interest that community might have had in improving what was already quite a low-traffic neighbourhood.

Lib Dems have also made it crystal clear that the dualling of the A9 is an absolute priority. At our spring conference in Inverness, my party backed the campaign to dual the A9 and made it a manifesto promise for next year's election.

**Jim Fairlie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I am really sorry, but I must make progress.

Dualling the A9 is about saving lives—it is not a charter for motorists but a charter for road safety. Every year, the A9, A96 and A82 have a body count that would result in our diggers being out widening the roads if we saw it on the M8 between Glasgow and Edinburgh. The A9, in particular, remains one of the UK's most dangerous roads. After John F Kennedy pledged to get to the moon, it took NASA only nine years; it has taken the SNP nearly 20 years to make glacial progress towards dualling the A9, which the SNP promised to do when it came to power in 2007.

The issue is so important, not only for the Highland economy but for its users' safety. Since 1979, 335 people have been killed on the A9's Perth to Inverness stretch. In 2022 alone, 13 people died. We cannot just let that continue to happen, which is why I, Sir Ed Davey, Angus MacDonald, Andrew Baxter, who is our Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch candidate, and David

Green, who is our Caithness, Sutherland and Ross candidate—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Cole-Hamilton, please resume your seat for a second. I appreciate that an election is coming up, albeit not until next year, but we are not in a hustings. We are in a Parliament, and I hope that members will act accordingly. Please conclude.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** It is just a measure of the passion that we all feel and why we signed the pledge in the *Inverness Courier* to dual the A9. We know how vital that is, not only for our Highland economy but for the safety of the road users who are trying to get to it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. Back benchers will have speeches of up to four minutes.

15:49

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** It has been said that the epitome of the SNP's war on Scottish motorists is the low-emission zone, and the exemplar of the folly of those schemes is the Aberdeen LEZ. In force since June 2024, it swiftly claimed the record for resulting in the most fines issued in a month, with more than 6,000 slapped on north-east motorists. It was a significant contributor to statistics showing that the Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee LEZs collectively resulted in the issuing of 58,000 fines for drivers, which were worth more than £6.3 million, in the first six months of operation of the schemes.

Many people from across Scotland have contacted me to raise concerns about the regressive social impacts of LEZs, suggesting that they disproportionately impact those in lower-income households, who are more likely to have older cars, to have jobs that require their physical presence and to travel to and from work at times or places where public transport is less frequent or indeed absent.

The minister proudly said that there are LEZs throughout Europe, but he failed to mention Madrid's LEZ, which a court annulled last year because its economic consequences disproportionately impacted low-income residents. However, the response to a freedom of information request to Aberdeen City Council, whose postcodes were generating record numbers of fines, showed that no such analysis was being done.

Furthermore, many constituents and businesses have raised with me concerns about the impact on Union Street and Aberdeen city centre, with reports of reduced footfall as a result of people choosing alternative shopping options or just not

going into town. My authority for that is reports that I have got my hands on from traders in towns surrounding Aberdeen, which suggest that their footfall and businesses rocketed after the introduction of the LEZ and the bus gates. One councillor in the shire said:

"Of course it's massively helping our ... hospitality and retail outlets which are seeing a marked lift in business".

However, when I asked Aberdeen City Council what research it was doing on the impact of LEZs on footfall, spend and consumer choices, it said—you guessed it—that it is not collating that data.

Members might recall that the stated aim of the SNP's LEZs was to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality. When I asked the council when it would be measuring the air quality in the LEZ so that, presumably, it could show the intended reduction in emissions and justify its draconian measures and the appalling economic and social impacts, I was told that there is no published information, nor is there any data comparing emission reductions—if any—in the LEZ with increases in emissions from diverted traffic through additional miles travelled by vehicles. The council has introduced an LEZ, but it has no idea whether it has achieved any emission reductions.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** Liam Kerr made an important point about the low-emission zone in Madrid. Another good example from Madrid is how efficiently it has built its metro system—I think that it is the most cost-efficient system per mile anywhere in the world. Could we do more in Scotland to benchmark excellent infrastructure projects such as the Madrid metro and build more such infrastructure here?

**Liam Kerr:** We could definitely do more in Scotland. Unfortunately, we will never do more while we have an SNP Government in place.

People will begin to suspect that, far from being about emission reductions, LEZs are about the SNP introducing schemes to generate money for councils, which it so woefully underfunds, from exorbitant fines on drivers. The reality is that Aberdeen's LEZ is hammering businesses and our great city centre, is disproportionately hitting those of lesser means and is unlikely to be having any significant impact on emissions. Alongside the Aberdeen bus gates, it is the embodiment of virtue-signalling, ideologically led and unevidenced policy making on the hoof. The sooner both schemes are consigned to history, the better for us all.

15:53

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** In a move that would make the US President proud, the Tory party has lodged a Trumpian word salad

of a motion calling for an end to the Scottish Government's so-called war on motorists, using the low-emission zone in Aberdeen as an example of bad policy. For some, it might come as a bit of a surprise to find out which party was in control of Aberdeen City Council when the low-emission zone was proposed. It was, of course, the Tories. Now, the same Tories demand that the Scottish Government prevents councillors, including Tories, from embarking on such schemes in the future.

Just so that we have a debate that is based on facts and not fiction, let us consider the history of the Aberdeen low-emission zone. On 6 February 2020, Aberdeen City Council's city growth and resources committee unanimously agreed to the move, along with holding public and stakeholder engagement, on options for a city centre low-emission zone. We already know that the Tories were the party in charge, along with their Labour allies at the time, but who was the committee convener? I will give members a clue: he is sitting on the Tory benches, or he was earlier. It was Mr Douglas Lumsden MSP. The Aberdeen LEZ was proposed by a Tory-led committee in a Tory-led council.

However, it does not stop there. In response to the Tory plan for a low-emission zone in Aberdeen, the co-leader of Aberdeen City Council said:

"the unanimous decision today is to be welcomed as we are committed to reducing emissions across Aberdeen and particularly in the city centre."

Who was the council leader who was so supportive of the low-emission zone? Of course, it was Mr Douglas Lumsden, who showered praise on his own low-emission zone.

Yet again, it does not stop there. Only a month later, armed with his plan for a low-emission zone, Douglas Lumsden presented the annual Aberdeen City Council budget and proudly stated:

"We approved a low-emission zone for the city".

He added:

"This is our"—

the Tories'—

"commitment and contribution to delivering an ambitious low emission zone within the heart of our city."

It is more than a little rich for the Tories to demand today that the Scottish Government protects motorists from low-emission zones when they were proudly calling the Aberdeen one theirs in 2020.

Let us be crystal clear that Mr Lumsden and the Tories not only proposed the low-emission zone in Aberdeen but also started implementing the work. A year and a half later, in October 2021, when Mr

Lumsden was on the council as well as here in Parliament, he proudly said that it was

"good to see work continuing on the project."

We in Aberdeen are not unforgiving. In his 2020 budget speech announcing his funding of the low-emission zone, Mr Lumsden proudly stood up and told the Lord Provost of Aberdeen that he would "make no apology" for his low-emission zone. He could always take the opportunity to apologise to the Parliament today if he now thinks that the LEZ was such a bad idea.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude, Mr Stewart.

**Kevin Stewart:** Is that not just another example of Tory hypocrisy, opportunism and nonsense?

15:58

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** To bring some common sense back to the chamber, I echo what Sue Webber said in her opening remarks. The SNP has indeed declared war on Scotland's motorists. Whether it be low-emission zones, roads crumbling away with potholes being unfilled or proposed reductions in speed limits, the SNP is making life more difficult for people who choose to own a car.

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Meghan Gallacher:** Oh, this will be good.

**Gordon MacDonald:** It is. Since 2010, under the Conservatives, vehicle excise duty for new cars has risen from £1,200 to £2,605, and car insurance premium tax went up from 5 per cent in 2010 to 12 per cent in 2017. Which party is it that has a war on motorists, again?

**Meghan Gallacher:** It is the SNP that has a war on motorists, and I will explain why in a second.

I represent a commuter region. Many people who live across the central belt of Scotland travel to and from our major cities for work, school and university. Good transport links, affordable prices and reliable public services are essential for those towns and villages. However, whether it be in relation to train, bus or car, the SNP has punished Scotland's commuters.

Two of the busiest motorways run through central Scotland—the M74 and the M8—and they are designed to be the easiest routes to travel on to reach Glasgow or Edinburgh if people live in North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire or Falkirk. However, constituents regularly write to me to tell me how congested those roads are, especially during the rush hour. The journey from the Newhouse roundabout to Edinburgh city centre can take up to two hours in the morning despite

the distance being only 31 miles. The SNP needs to announce a plan to alleviate the pressures on our busiest roads. It cannot simply remove the choice of driving from people who want to drive just because it cannot reach its own emission targets.

However, it is not just commuters who have felt the force of the SNP's war on Scotland's motorists. Donald MacLeod, owner of Glasgow nightclubs the Garage and the Cathouse Rock Club, believes that Glasgow's low-emission zone restrictions have had a lasting impact on the night-time economy. Glasgow was once regarded as a retail powerhouse, being a desired location that many of my constituents would regularly visit for social and retail use. However, many parts of the city are now derelict, with boards on shop windows and "closing down" signs outnumbering the businesses that are struggling to stay open.

Since the introduction of the city's LEZ, the dramatic drop in footfall across the country has turned Glasgow into, in Donald MacLeod's words, a "low economy zone". That is the real, lasting impact of the SNP's anti-motorist agenda. It is bad for business and bad for economic growth.

Donald MacLeod and other business owners have called on Glasgow City Council to lift the low-emission zone restrictions in the city from 6 pm to 6 am to help to revive Glasgow's struggling night-time economy. That is just one of many suggestions that have been brought forward by business owners who are desperately trying to find solutions to problems that have been created by Governments.

I return to the point that I made at the start of my speech. If there was good, reliable and affordable public transport, it would not only help to reduce emissions naturally but also provide Scotland's commuters with a choice, and people might make the switch. They do not have that choice at present, and that is why the SNP needs to get a grip on public transport and provide a network that people have confidence in.

16:02

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** Although I sympathise with some elements of the motion, its framing is deeply facile and disingenuous. The reality is that transport in Scotland is a critical issue that affects national life, as it connects people to jobs and economic opportunities. That velocity of movement and connection between people generates growth and prosperity for the communities that we are elected to represent. That is why it is so important. Distilling it down into the idea of some sort of war is not entirely helpful.

I recognise that there are flaws in the delivery of public policy in this area and that there has been a

tendency to focus on punitive measures at the expense of proper long-term strategic investment. For example, Glasgow, which I represent, accounts for 20 per cent of Scotland's economy. The Centre for Cities estimates that the underperformance of the Glasgow economy costs Scotland £7 billion a year, which is largely down to the dysfunctional nature of its public transport system. Although Glasgow's public transport system performs relatively well at a UK level, it is severely underperforming relative to its European peers. That must be addressed.

The Government has worked with Glasgow City Council on the development of measures such as the connectivity commission, which was established seven years ago but on which no further progress has been made. Other cities around Europe have moved far ahead in investing in metro systems, extending trams and delivering the regulation of buses, such as in the case of Manchester. I worry that the pace of improvement is nowhere near where it needs to be.

There are three main reasons why this is important. First, Glasgow's economy is underperforming relative to its peers by an amount that is equivalent to 4.5 per cent of Scotland's gross domestic product. There is a huge prize to be won if we unlock that potential. If we can get Glasgow to a level of competitiveness with European cities of a similar size, such as Munich, we can unlock huge opportunity for this country.

Secondly, Glasgow has the lowest rate of car ownership in the UK. According to the 2011 census, 41 per cent of Glaswegians do not own a car—that is well above Britain's average of 26 per cent. That makes Glasgow more dependent on the performance of its public transport network and accentuates social inequality in the city, which is already problematic.

That is not helped by the fact that Glasgow has a major motorway running through the heart of the city, which reduces incentives to improve public transport, because it means that the richest and most prosperous people in the city region can enjoy the benefits of private car ownership, which are not accessible to the poorest households.

Thirdly, transport choices have environmental implications, which means that air pollution is a bigger problem in urban centres such as Glasgow than it is in more rural areas. Poor air quality disproportionately affects the poorest people in Glasgow and the poorest neighbourhoods, which border the M8 motorway that runs through the heart of the city.

**Jim Fairlie:** Will the member give way?

**Paul Sweeney:** I would be happy to.

**Jim Fairlie:** Will the member recognise and celebrate the fact that Glasgow City Council has spent more than £500,000 of the money that it has made from LEZs on tree planting in order to improve the environment in Glasgow city centre?

**Paul Sweeney:** That is good, but it is a tokenistic measure. In the grand scheme of things, £500,000 is a drop in the ocean. Glasgow needs £500 million or £5 billion—that is the scale of investment that we are talking about. That is the amount of money that we need to bring into Glasgow to build the Clyde metro and to deliver the scale of investment that other European cities enjoy. We need to get real about the issue—we need to go big or go home. The Clyde metro remains a nebulous project, and we are nowhere near fulfilling the true potential of the city.

I do not understand why there is such a negative feedback loop. There is ever greater congestion on our roads, and buses are performing less efficiently because of that rising congestion. We have a doom loop of increasing problems. The biggest capital investment in Glasgow's transport system is the more than £150 million that is being spent on patching up the 1970s motorway viaduct that runs through Cowcaddens.

The Government's approach is simply not coherent. It needs to adopt a much better approach in order to unlock the true potential of the city of Glasgow, which can benefit Scotland as a whole.

16:06

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Earlier this year, the Scottish Government was forced to abandon its target for reducing car use by 20 per cent by 2030. It was an ambitious goal that, unfortunately, could not be met. The measures that have been taken in an attempt to reach that target do not equate to a war on motorists, as some would like to characterise it. If we are to tackle the climate crisis, we must reduce car emissions by making public transport more affordable and accessible, while maintaining the road infrastructure that so many still rely on. There must be more carrot and only as much stick as is needed.

It is of the utmost importance that we reduce our reliance on cars while ensuring that our roads are safe. The £36 million that the Scottish Government is investing in road safety this year is a welcome step. It is vital that that funding supports behavioural change and helps local authorities to improve their road infrastructure.

The Conservative motion mentions the national speed management review. Rather than being a golden bullet, that is simply a tool to ensure that all

speed limits are fit for their purpose. We know from international experience in France that a reduction in speed limits can reduce casualties. I am sure that members take road safety seriously, and our policies must reflect that.

Of course, cars will always have a place in our transport system, especially in rural areas of the country, but the environmental impact of widespread car use cannot be overstated. Cars account for 39 per cent of all transport emissions and 12.4 per cent of Scotland's total emissions. That is a reality that we cannot ignore. We must move towards zero-emission vehicles and build a sustainable public transport network.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**Colin Beattie:** I am sorry; I have only four minutes.

As we try to change travel behaviours, we must take the public with us. We cannot allow the narrative that we are engaged in a war against the public's interests to lie. Instead, we must prove that such action will benefit lives.

The Conservative Party's opposition to low-emission zones is deeply irresponsible and not in the least surprising. Let us be clear: no member would let children drink dirty water, so why should we let them breathe polluted air, especially after a study by the University of Dundee found that respiratory admissions for children were significantly higher in areas with poor air quality? Placing politics above public health would be shameful, and I am pleased that the Scottish Government has shown leadership in this area.

The Scottish Government has also made progress with the country's electric vehicle charging network. We now have the highest number of public EV charging devices per head of population of any UK nation. However, electric vehicles remain expensive, especially during a cost of living crisis. That is why we must focus on developing more incentives, such as affordable EV loans, to help families to switch to an eco-friendly alternative.

Public transport is key in reaching our net zero targets and for our economy. We have already seen the benefits of a public interest approach to transport. ScotRail's nationalisation has delivered major improvements, including higher passenger satisfaction and fewer compensation claims compared with other UK rail companies.

Unfortunately, the scheme scrapping peak rail fares did not produce the desired shift in travel habits. However, that should be a message to the Government to continue to work to incentivise such a shift.

Progress must also reach our rural communities. In rural Scotland, often a car is not a convenience but a necessity. Bus services are not so frequent and passenger satisfaction is lower than it is in the central belt. If we are serious about reducing car use, we must work with local authorities to invest in and improve rural bus routes to ensure that rural communities remain connected. Public transport is a lifeline for some of those communities.

Describing the Scottish Government's aim to reduce car use as a war is a gross mischaracterisation. It is not a war. It is a necessity in order to meet our climate targets and to improve transport for all in Scotland. The road ahead requires balance, supporting behavioural change with investment and encouraging greener choices through affordability while maintaining our road infrastructure to ensure the safety of all our constituents.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches. I call Mark Ruskell to close on behalf of the Scottish Greens.

16:10

**Mark Ruskell:** We have been subject to a blizzard of local press releases and election pitches this afternoon. I agree with Paul Sweeney that the motion that we are debating is somewhat "facile and disingenuous". We need a more measured debate on the subject. I ask the minister to acknowledge that, on transport policy, we are taking one step forward at a time and then, often, one step back.

I give the example of bus use. Free bus travel for under-22s is a fantastic scheme and I know that the minister backs it. He recognises the benefit that it has brought to young people. It has also increased bus use by 29 million journeys. However, at the same time as we have been rolling out that successful scheme, we have seen bus journeys decline by 20 million because of road congestion and the failure to tackle traffic congestion, which we are discussing this afternoon. That is undermining the hundreds of millions of pounds that have been invested in bus users and the bus network every year.

We need to see what, back in the day, was called policy coherence—that is, where one policy is not undermining another one. We cannot have a transport policy based only on having more of everything that everybody wants. Choices have to be made. That is why we have a transport hierarchy and it should be guiding investment. When the Confederation of Passenger Transport Scotland gave evidence to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee this week, it stated clearly that competition from cars was the primary

influence on bus use. Unless we tackle that issue and level the playing field, we will not see a rapid increase in bus use.

**Brian Whittle:** Will the member give way?

**Mark Ruskell:** I do not have time, unfortunately.

Choices need to be made. I ask the minister to reflect on the construction of the cross-Tay link road: £120 million is being invested in that transport infrastructure to benefit motorists. However, there are already starting to be congestion issues around Perth and Bridgend, which that bridge was meant to resolve.

We need to move away from going one step forward and one step back. We need to address the issues.

This is not a new debate. Back in 2006, the first ever climate inquiry in this Parliament recommended road user charging. It set the Executive a timescale of 10 years to get it right—the Executive had until 2016 to bring in a fair system of road user charging. That date has passed and we are now nearly 10 years on from 2016—it is nearly 2026 and we still have no more progress in Scotland on road user charging.

It will take calm heads and cross-party working in order to make progress on this. Perhaps it will take the kind of leadership that was shown by Douglas Lumsden when he was a councillor: behaving rationally, taking your party-political hat off and looking at the issues that need to be addressed. We see that kind of leadership in councils from time to time. The conversation with COSLA is really important because it is clear that there are those in local authorities who need, and want, to tackle traffic congestion using a range of measures.

I urge the Government to make progress in areas in which there is consensus. A regulatory review is looking at powers of road charging. We could be looking at simplifying the traffic regulation order process or decriminalising road offences. I think that there are areas of consensus among councils and the Government that we can use to make progress.

I welcome the minister's support for the re-regulation of buses. I would urge him to make that process as simple as possible. It is clear that we need public transport to be run in the public interest, and we can only really achieve that if we have public and community operators in that mix.

This is a short debate, but I am sure that we will come back to this subject between now and the end of the parliamentary session.



16:15

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** The language that is used in the Tory motion does not reflect reality, and it has been criticised a lot around the chamber. However, some good points have been made. It is clear to a lot of us that the SNP Government dumped its target of a 20 per cent reduction in car use because it knew that it was not going to deliver and it did not have a plan.

Several colleagues have talked about the need to lower carbon emissions across the country if we are to address the climate emergency. We are now seeing extreme weather, which is leading to increased flooding and forest fires in Scottish communities. Transport is a key sector where we face a challenge in reducing our emissions, but we need to do that in such a way that people will have better choices and more affordable, accessible and reliable public transport services that they can use.

We need to think about how we can have safer roads. I will come back to that point, which has been raised several times. We need to think about people's health and improving air quality.

To pick up on what Mark Ruskell said as he finished his winding-up speech, we do not have the bus and train services that people in Scotland urgently need. That is a key message from young people. They love the idea of the under-22 bus pass but, as one of them said in a meeting that I was at, it is not much use if people do not have a bus to use it on. We have opportunities, but we are not delivering on them.

As Claire Baker powerfully argued in her opening speech, reintroducing peak rail fares after passenger use had increased by 6 per cent was a mistake, because it will stop people using the trains, and it means that they will have to revert to using a car to get to work. Three price hikes in just over a year disproportionately punished those who chose to use the train instead of driving, and that has meant that roads are more and more congested. People have to use cars even when it is not necessarily their first choice and even when it is not affordable for them, because they simply cannot rely on buses, particularly if they have a bus route but the buses are delayed by traffic congestion.

There is a real challenge here. In many of our rural communities or on the edge of towns, people do not even have transport services at all, and we do not have a connected system between bus and rail.

This is not about a war on drivers. The debate should be about how to provide people with real, affordable choices—with more efficient and reliable public transport choices across Scotland—and with opportunities for safer active travel,

especially for shorter journeys. Instead of increasing car use, we could reduce car use and have fewer cars on the road, and we could make it easier for people who drive not to get stuck in traffic queues.

There has been a lot of debate about low-emission zones. They are reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality. One thing that was interesting in Edinburgh was learning from Glasgow's experience of working with businesses before the LEZ there was introduced. The other thing in Edinburgh—

**Liam Kerr:** Will the member give way?

**Sarah Boyack:** I am down to the last minute of my speech.

The SNP has let Scotland's roads crumble. That is probably one of the few things in Sue Webber's opening speech that I agreed with. Scotland's road repair backlog for potholes has now risen to an eye-watering £2.6 billion. That means that the roads are not safe for people who are walking and cycling. It is not good for bikes and vehicles, as potholes damage tyres and increase people's costs.

In Edinburgh, the Labour-led council had to make difficult choices in its budget because of years of underfunding by the SNP Government, but the cross-party council rejected the cuts to pothole funding suggested by the SNP councillors. We need to get that cross-party work right.

With better choices, more and more people would actually have a choice of when they use their car, instead of experiencing more congestion and delays. Anyone who has driven on the Edinburgh bypass will know that it regularly grinds to a halt, because there are far too many vehicles on it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** You need to conclude.

**Sarah Boyack:** We need more joined-up thinking between public transport organisations, with more choices for people. That is not happening at the moment.

16:19

**Jim Fairlie:** I genuinely express my gratitude to members across the chamber for their valuable contributions and for the consensus on the work going forward, which I and the cabinet secretary are very happy to do.

We have to accept that we are predominantly a rural and sparsely populated country. I recognise that opportunities to change the mode of transport in remote rural communities are limited. Switching to electric vehicles will be of higher importance in those areas than it is in the cities.

However, it is clear from members' contributions that we agree on many things, including the provision of high-quality affordable transport options in order to reduce travel costs and take climate action, and the need to offer a sustainable and affordable alternative to private cars. I encourage continuous productive engagement among members in the chamber who are prepared to do that.

It is widely accepted that LEZs are an effective and necessary tool to reduce pollution and, therefore, to protect public health—

**Liam Kerr:** Will the minister give way?

**Jim Fairlie:** The four cities involved, and the Government, can rightly be proud of the introduction of LEZs. I also recognise, and am thankful for, the investment that responsible businesses and vehicle owners have already made to continue to make LEZs work—

**Brian Whittle:** Will the minister give way?

**Sue Webber:** Will the minister give way?

**Jim Fairlie:** As I said earlier, Glasgow has invested £500,000 of revenue from LEZs in tree planting and greening projects and in broader climate action.

**Liam Kerr:** Will the minister give way?

**Jim Fairlie:** At this point, I should applaud Kevin Stewart for hitting the Tory hypocrisy on the head on the LEZ in Aberdeen; I wonder where Mr Lumsden is right now.

Road safety is a key concern, and our aim is for Scotland to have the best safety performance in the world by 2030, yet in 2024, there were 167 road fatalities—

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

**Jim Fairlie:** I will take interventions if I get time.

**Edward Mountain:** Will the minister give way?

**Jim Fairlie:** I will take interventions if I get time—right now, I want to get through these points, and I urge members to listen.

Road safety is a key concern, and our aim is for Scotland to have the best safety performance in the world by 2030, yet in 2024, there were 167 road fatalities—an 8 per cent rise from 2023—and the early signs suggest that 2025 is following a similar trend. The evidence is clear that reducing the national speed limit on single carriageways by 10mph can reduce fatalities on those roads by 23 per cent and serious injuries by 18 per cent. That is a step that will save lives while maintaining journey times—

**Liam Kerr:** Will the minister take an intervention? Come on.

**Jim Fairlie:** Unlike the Conservatives, we are awaiting the outcome of the national speed management review public consultation before proposing any changes. The review is complete, but it has not yet reported. The public consultation had more than 19,500 responses and there were more than 26 public engagement sessions, so we will wait for the outcome of that review before we make any decisions. I urge members on the Conservative side of the chamber to consider that point as we go forward.

This is not a war on motorists—it is a responsible Government action to protect lives, improve journey time reliability and future proof our transport network—

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

**Jim Fairlie:** Very quickly.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Finlay Carson, briefly.

**Finlay Carson:** Is it true that the minister would rather see a reduction of 10mph on routes such as the A75 Euroroute than the Government doing the right thing and investing in that road to make it a dual carriageway?

**Jim Fairlie:** I dismiss the point that the member makes. I have stated the point behind the review, and that is the basis on which we will be working.

Scotland has one of the most comprehensive public charging networks in the UK. We have reached our target of 6,000 public charge points two years early, and we have more rapid public charging points per head of population than any other part of the UK except the south-east—

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** Will the minister give way?

**Jim Fairlie:** I am sorry—I do not have time today.

I welcome the introduction of the UK Government regulations on public EV charging, including those concerning charge point reliability. I urge all charge point operators to adhere to those regulations and to ensure that drivers receive the level of service that they rightly expect.

I will try to make a couple of points very quickly. First, I am quite sure that members on the Conservative side of the chamber will celebrate the fact that Fiona Hyslop is in Tomatin today to mark the start of the works. I also remind members, when we talk about the delays in dualling the A9, that the Parliament forced the SNP to transfer funding from the A9 to the trams network quite a number of years ago—that is a point worth making.

Mark Ruskell said that we need to give local authorities more opportunities to make public transport work. I absolutely agree, and the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 gives them those opportunities. On road congestion, I agree, which is why I am continuing to engage with the Scottish road works commissioner.

I see that I am coming to the end of my time, Deputy Presiding Officer, so I will finish there.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Graham Simpson to wind up—you have up to six minutes.

16:24

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** The debate has been interesting; I use that word to be generous, because the debate has not really told us anything that we did not know already. We already knew that there are parties in the Parliament that are anti-motorist, and that includes the governing party.

Sue Webber's motion covers all bases, as did Miss Webber, but there is a lot to say. We have billed the debate as "ending the 'war' against Scotland's motorists"—it can feel that way sometimes.

Before I get to the various points that have been raised, I start by praising the cabinet secretary. At last week's Public Audit Committee meeting, she was honest enough to admit to me that the target to cut car miles by a fifth by 2030 is dead in the water. In fact, it was never possible, because to do so would mean taking even more punitive measures against motorists than we already have, and it would require an improvement in public transport provision, which is the carrot that we need to encourage people to use their cars less. According to Transport Scotland, public transport use would have needed to increase by 222 per cent. Given that the Government has reintroduced peak fares on trains and is not off the starting line with integrated ticketing, that is not going to happen.

As the Auditor General said of the now-axed car reduction target, there never was a delivery plan. He did not say that the reason for that is that the actions that would be needed to achieve the target would be unpalatable. Our motion calls on the Government to incentivise people to use their cars less, which is entirely right. I do not want to drive everywhere, but most of my journeys are by car, as I have no viable alternative. If I need to get about in Edinburgh, I often use the excellent public transport system, or I walk or cycle. In East Kilbride, where I live, and in the rest of Central Scotland, the public transport system is not so great, as Meghan Gallacher and other members from the region know very well.

**Paul Sweeney:** The member makes an excellent point about East Kilbride and the fact that the recent investment in the so-called upgrading of the East Kilbride line to Glasgow will not dual track the route, so the frequency of travel cannot be extended to a useful turn-up-and-go timetable, which would allow users to turn up and get the train within a reasonable time.

**Graham Simpson:** That is entirely correct, but I am looking forward to the line reopening on 18 May.

We tend to think of motorists as people who jump into their cars for a journey but, surely, the term refers to anyone who drives, which they might do for a living, as Sue Webber said. Bus drivers, lorry drivers, van drivers and tradesmen are all motorists and are all vital to the economy.

**Jim Fairlie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Graham Simpson:** Like you, minister, I do not have time.

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

**Graham Simpson:** Although it is true that transport is the biggest-emitting sector, it is also true that the economy cannot function without it. People and goods need to get about and we should be making it easier, not harder, to do that. That is why it is essential that roads such as the A9 and A96 are fully dualled, and that the M8 is improved, as frustrated driver Meghan Gallacher called for. It is why the SNP's move to cut the national speed limit on single carriageway roads to 50mph is wrong—the right approach is a local approach. There are some such roads on which driving at 60mph is crazy. The SNP should change those speed limits, but not everything else.

Measures have already been put in place to make life difficult for people. Low-emission zones, which penalise those who cannot afford newer vehicles, are an example. Glasgow went first, started its enforcement in June 2023 and botched it. It was followed by Dundee, Aberdeen and Edinburgh. Liam Kerr has told us in no uncertain terms about the impact of the LEZ in Aberdeen.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will the member give way?

**Graham Simpson:** I am about to mention Mr Stewart, as he gave an unusually amusing speech and revealed my colleague Douglas Lumsden to be a cheerleader for LEZs. Mr Lumsden is back from his tour of LEZs—that is good.

Members would think that the nonsense would stop there, but they would be wrong. We now know, thanks to evidence supplied by COSLA and Transport Scotland to the Public Audit Committee last week, that Scotland's largest councils—

Glasgow City Council and the City of Edinburgh Council—want to continue to wage war on their citizens, with plans to introduce road pricing. The Glasgow transport strategy commits Glasgow City Council to lobbying the Scottish Government to introduce national road user charging, which would allow for regional schemes. Edinburgh wants to go down the same route, if necessary—and you can bet your bottom dollar that it will consider it necessary. However, that can happen only if we give those councils the power to do so, and we should not.

Scotland is a diverse and very rural country. People need to drive. We should not treat motorists as the enemy, as some in the chamber want to. Cars and other vehicles are essential—let us treat them as such.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on ending the war against Scotland's motorists. There will be a brief pause to allow front-bench teams to change positions.

## Fishing Industry

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-17360, in the name of Tim Eagle, on protecting Scotland's fishing industry. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as possible.

16:30

**Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** When I was representing my local fishing community as a councillor, I made a promise that, if I ever became an MSP, I would make sure to raise the subject of fishing. I have already fulfilled that promise, and I continue to do so willingly.

The thrust of today's debate centres around worrying reports that the United Kingdom Labour Government is preparing to trade away our country's fishing rights. Fishermen across Scotland are alarmed by that. I know that because many have been in touch with me. It has been widely reported that Labour's desire for a deal means that it has forgotten fishermen, which could lead to its making a new deal that includes a multi-annual agreement and a freeze on quotas. That compares with the planned end of the trade and co-operation agreement next year, which would have brought annual negotiations and a significant transfer of rights back to the UK fleet.

I am more than happy to give way right now if the Scottish Labour front bench wants to intervene and give the sector a full assurance that that is not true and will not happen.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** It is absolutely crass to suggest that fishing will be negotiated for national security. Surely, the member recognises that.

**Tim Eagle:** I did not say that.

**Rhoda Grant:** That is the premise of your motion. I ask you to recant and actually have a debate about fishing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Through the chair, please.

**Tim Eagle:** The member might need to read my motion. It does not mention defence, and I am not going to mention defence in my speech—others may, but I am not going to. I deliberately did not mention that in the motion.

Labour seems hesitant to talk about the truth that it is selling out our fishermen. However, if it had given us the assurance that I just asked for, this whole debate could have changed.

I am acutely aware that there are differences of opinion—based on politics—in this debate, which

will, no doubt, come out today. However, as the subject means a great deal to me, I will try to counter them from the start.

The Scottish National Party will probably want to challenge me on Brexit—I see that Angus Robertson is in the room—which is ever the norm for that party. However, is the SNP going to tell us what re-entry into the common fisheries policy would look like if it took us back into the European Union? I doubt that it can discuss that in depth, because the SNP would never secure a treaty change if an independent Scotland rejoined the EU, which I hope never happens. In that scenario, the CFP would be back in full force.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** Perhaps the member would like to read our paper on the marine economy and what that would look like in an independent Scotland, which was published as part of our “Building a New Scotland” series. I am sure that he would be greatly interested in what he would find out about the power that we would have and the position that we would be in as an independent member state of the EU.

**Tim Eagle:** I will read rhetoric from the SNP less and listen more to my constituents who want out of the common fisheries policy.

Labour members will perhaps challenge me on the Brexit deal. Perhaps they will cry that it could have been done better, but I doubt that Labour would have done better, judging by what we might be about to hear on 19 May, when Sir Keir Starmer’s planned EU-UK summit takes place in London.

I want to say this before anyone else does: when the UK signed the trade and co-operation agreement with the EU, it did not deliver a deal on fishing that met the expectations of the catching sector. However, it delivered two important things: withdrawal from the hated common fisheries policy and an opportunity to gain an even better deal in 2026-27. For years, I have felt confident saying to fishermen that those twin gains were a given. Now, however, the Labour Party is putting them in peril.

Annually, Scottish fishermen land more than 500,000 tonnes, with a value of £683 million, including £175 million-worth that is landed abroad. However, the debate is about not just the sector’s economic contribution to Scotland but its cultural one. There is a rich and deep bond between the Scottish people and our natural assets, both onshore and offshore. For many, the connection with fishing is ingrained deeply in the collective memory of the generations of family members who have lived and worked with the sea. It is in the blood.

Polling released today by the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation—I thank it for this work—shows us that

“Almost nine out of 10 Scots believe the UK should definitely control which vessels fish in its waters”

and that

“87% of people believe the UK should have full powers over which fleets fish in the UK ... Exclusive Economic Zone, with just 3.2% disagreeing.”

Interestingly, that figure is high even in the central belt. That should be a wake-up call to Scottish Labour to get down to London with a clear message: this deal cannot be made; we must protect our fishing industry.

Several months ago, I asked the SNP to bring a Government debate on fishing to the chamber, recognising there has not been one in more than two years. That still has not happened. I recognise that the cabinet secretary told me before that it is going through the process, but what is taking so long?

Sadly, I do not have time to go into depth on other issues, such as the spatial squeeze; gill nets; illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and the on-going discussions around inshore fisheries, scallop dredging and cockle closures. Nor do I have time to touch on significant concerns around the function of the marine directorate and marine protected areas. All of those issues lie solely within the control of the SNP Government. I believe that, if not in this parliamentary session, certainly in the next session a full and detailed review needs to be carried out in those areas.

Worryingly, I have also heard reports from the Government that it is looking to cancel the contract for marine aeroplane surveillance from its base in Inverness, with very little time for any discussion. That could potentially cost a number of jobs and would be a big blow not just to Inverness airport and jobs in the Highlands but to the fishing sector, which relies on those planes to monitor fishing in our waters.

I have written to the cabinet secretary, asking for an update on that, but, if she can give us any answers in her speech, that would be great. If those reports are true, it would be a shocking blow to marine protection in Scotland and I call on the Government to urgently rethink that decision.

I would never consider asking France for 40 per cent of its vineyards for a deal, although I enjoy its wine. The EU should not be asking us for our natural resources. It is time, once and for all, for Britain to again have a prosperous, sustainable fishing industry in our hands, with us leading negotiations on access. It is time that we stood up for our fishing sector—catching and processing—

and for our coastal communities and all who know its rich history, because it is in Scotland's DNA.

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its deep concern at reports that the UK Labour administration may agree a deal with the EU that enhances access for EU fishing vessels to UK waters; understands that the reported deal could result in a multi-year access guarantee as opposed to annual negotiations between the UK and the EU; believes that Scotland's domestic fishing industry is a significant contributor to the economy and that every effort should be made to support it during trade negotiations; notes that the existing fisheries deal between the EU and the UK is not perfect, but that it took the sector out of the Common Fisheries Policy; acknowledges that the UK Labour administration's potential new deal would turn a good opportunity to build on this foundation into a missed opportunity that represents a backwards step for the sector as bad as the Common Fisheries Policy; calls on the Scottish Government to drop its support for the Common Fisheries Policy and do all that it can to ensure that the UK Labour administration does not sell out the Scottish fishing industry as part of its talks with the EU, and believes that there should be an annual debate on fisheries to highlight its importance to Scotland's economy.

16:37

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** I welcome Tim Eagle's recognition that the TCA did not deliver for the fishing sector. Perhaps the Scottish Tories should have opened the debate by offering an apology to our fishing communities, given the harmful Brexit deal that they inflicted on Scotland against our will. Far from delivering a sea of opportunity, they delivered the worst of both worlds, as was noted by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. Coming to this chamber to pose as the champions of the fishing industry would be laughable if the matter was not so serious. The term "brass neck" springs to mind.

Benefits from the trade and co-operation agreement have been extremely limited. Moreover, the effects of Brexit represent permanent and on-going barriers to trade that significantly impair the competitiveness of our seafood sector. Today, this Government urges the UK Labour Administration not to repeat the failures of the previous UK Government. A heavy price has already been paid, with the fishing industry impacted far worse than many others. The Scottish Government cares deeply about securing a prosperous future for fishing communities and seeks to deliver the best outcome for our fishing interests in both catching and processing.

When I addressed the chamber on 18 February, in response to Beatrice Wishart's members' business debate, I emphasised that Scotland's fishing industry is

"ingrained in our national identity."—[*Official Report*, 18 February 2025; c 107.]

It plays a vital role in Scotland's marine economy and it is a significant aspect of the economic, social and cultural fabric of Scotland's rural, coastal and island communities. It is therefore essential that, as we face another milestone in the Brexit era, the UK Labour Government hears what we, in Scotland, have to say. I remain frustrated and deeply disappointed that, despite a promise to reset relationships, my UK Government counterparts have not sought to engage on these matters, which are of such importance to Scotland.

One of the Government's priorities is driving economic growth, and fishing and our wider seafood sector are key parts of that. As I have just outlined, one of Scotland's most important assets is our fishing industry, including the people and communities who make a living from it, and its contribution to the Scottish economy is vital.

Recent media coverage shows the lack of clarity in the UK Government's strategy in the lead-up to the EU-UK summit on 19 May. I appreciate that Rhoda Grant states in her amendment that "speculation is not helpful", but the UK Government has unfortunately left a complete vacuum on these issues, which means that there has essentially been no other option but to speculate.

It does not help when UK Government ministers contradict each other in what they say publicly. Stakeholders are blind, as are we, to what potential benefits—if any—might be sought by the UK Government and are left to worry about press statements and third-hand rumour. That is simply not good enough. We demand better for our fishing communities, given the disproportionate importance of fishing to the Scottish economy.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I appreciate the cabinet secretary's remarks. Has the Scottish Government reached out to the UK Labour Government to ask for a meeting to discuss Labour's important plans to concede fishing rights to the EU?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Unfortunately, the interministerial group meetings at which we would have hoped to discuss these issues over the past couple of months were cancelled at the last minute by my counterpart ministers in the UK Government. However, I hope to have an opportunity to catch up with the UK Government next week, and I will use that opportunity to discuss that point.

We need an agreement that delivers improvements for our fishing communities. We also need the UK Government to provide Scotland with a fair share of funding for our marine economy and coastal communities. The UK Government has imposed a short-term, Barnettised settlement, which is the complete

opposite of what was called for by devolved Governments across the UK. Baselineing the marine funding allocation at the current 2014 figure of £14 million simply does not reflect the reality of funding requirements.

If we compare that to our neighbours in the EU, we see that Denmark, for example, which has a population similar to Scotland's but has a smaller sea area and marine sector, will receive the equivalent of £25 million through the EU's current European maritime, fisheries and aquaculture fund. The post-Brexit power grab by the UK Government needs to be rectified as a matter of urgency.

The fact remains that we face a range of challenges arising from exiting the EU. There are permanent and on-going barriers to trade that are significantly impairing the competitiveness of our seafood sector. Although the trade and co-operation agreement avoided the imposition of tariffs, trade in seafood products with the EU is now subject to costly certification and inspection requirements. There is also the on-going threat of retaliatory tariffs on exports if the UK Government fails to meet relevant TCA obligations.

Securing an uplift in the TCA shares of fishing quotas is important and should always be based on zonal attachment—that is, where the fish mostly are. Of equal importance is the sustainable management of those shared and jointly managed stocks for the long-term future.

I remind members that we are debating a motion from a party that delivered a deeply damaging deal—one that was not in the Scottish national interest. In the words of one former MP,

“the UK Government has delivered far less than I hoped or expected ... It would be easier to get someone to drink a pint of cold sick than to try to sell this as a success.”

The UK Government has a lot of work to do if it wants to meaningfully address the inadequacies of the TCA. We call on it to engage with the Scottish Government as a matter of urgency, so that we can work with it to address these matters and deliver for Scotland's fishing industry.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The point that the cabinet secretary made was—I know the word that I am not allowed to use—deliberately misleading and referred to a previous deal.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are not allowed to use that terminology either, Mr Ross.

**Douglas Ross:** I cannot use the words “lying” or “deliberately misleading”?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No, you cannot.

**Douglas Ross:** What words can I use?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is not a point of order, Mr Ross.

**Douglas Ross:** The cabinet secretary has—*[Interruption.]* I said “deliberately misleading”, but I am not allowed to use that term either. The cabinet secretary deliberately used a quote that did not refer to the final Brexit deal on fishing and claimed that that was the opinion of the member who said it—me—when it was not. I do not know how that can be corrected on the record. The cabinet secretary deliberately tried to use a phrase in this debate that was not in context.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have made your point, Mr Ross. That is not a point of order—it is perhaps a debating point.

I require the cabinet secretary to move her amendment.

**Mairi Gougeon:** I move amendment S6M-17370.3, to leave out from first “with the EU” to second “with the EU” and insert:

“on fishing with the EU that enhances access for EU fishing vessels to UK waters without consulting the Scottish Government, despite the fishing industry being of comparatively greater importance to the Scottish economy than to the UK economy as a whole; understands that the reported deal could result in a multi-year access guarantee as opposed to annual negotiations between the UK and the EU; notes the need for an agreement that delivers improvements for Scotland's fishing communities, including access to the single market for fish and seafood and long-term stability for fishing businesses; further notes the poor record of successive UK Conservative and Labour administrations in delivering for Scotland's coastal communities; calls on the UK Government to engage with fishing stakeholders and the Scottish Government to ensure that Trade and Cooperation Agreement renegotiations reflect the needs and priorities of the Scottish fishing industry; further calls on the UK Government to provide multi-annual funding that keeps pace with the equivalent EU funding that Scotland would have received as a member state, and that all marine funding be devolved; recognises the significant economic harm created by Brexit in reducing trade and access to labour for fishing businesses”.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Rhoda Grant to speak to and move amendment S6M-17360.1.

16:44

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** The Conservatives are so devoid of ideas that they are reduced to a point whereby they must feed discord on everything that they touch. The United Kingdom Government will, of course, hold talks on future working relationships and management of resources with European neighbours—and everyone knows that those talks are scheduled to take place in May.

We all know that fish know no boundaries and, because of that, negotiations have always taken

place on fisheries. No one can pretend that those negotiations have taken place in a way that works for the industry. Often, annual negotiations go down to the wire and the industry does not know what its quota will be.

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

**Rhoda Grant:** I will take a very quick intervention.

**Tim Eagle:** Does the member agree that it is best to have annual negotiations, as was expected at the end of the TCA, rather than multi-annual negotiations, which is being rumoured under the Labour deal?

**Rhoda Grant:** There is no deal. We will see what comes out, and we will have discussions about that when it happens.

How the previous UK Conservative Government handled those negotiations did not work for the fishing industry. It is surprising that the Scottish Conservatives are trying to defend that, because positive changes to those negotiations would be welcome and would give our fishing industry more certainty and security.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Rhoda Grant:** I do not have time to take another intervention.

The Scottish Conservative motion seeks to suggest that we need no change to the current system that its Government presided over. What is much more concerning is that it seeks to conflate our national security and the security of the European continent with discussions on our working relationship with the European Union.

Regardless of what happens with the talks in May, the United Kingdom needs to work with the whole of Europe to protect our national interests in the light of Russian aggression. That is essential for our shared security. Not working together would be in no one's interests, and it is simply wrong to suggest otherwise. Furthermore, it is crass, in the face of an aggressor, to conflate our national security with our economic wellbeing. The UK Government has made it clear that that will not happen.

There are messages on the fisheries negotiations that we, as a Parliament, must clearly send to the United Kingdom Government. We all understand the importance of fisheries to Scotland, and we need to encourage new entrants into the industry. Setting up fishing enterprises requires investment, so we need to create entry-level opportunities. We also all know that more of the earnings of smaller boats are retained in their

communities, and that is an excellent way to encourage new entrants. New entrants also need to be able to access quota. Therefore, new quota must be leased in the public interest, not sold to the highest bidder. We should build on the Shetland model, in which quota is owned by a community and then leased to those who live in the local community and land their catches in Shetland. Orkney Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar also do that with prawn quota.

That should be how we manage our quota going forward. It gives councils the ability to manage fisheries in a way that benefits local economies. That is community wealth building in action: retaining the economic wealth of our fishing industries in our communities to ensure that we have the onshore benefits as well as the offshore benefits of fishing. All those things need to be discussed and put in place.

Let us be clear that the Tories pushed for Brexit to take back control of fishing. Sadly, they had already allowed the sale of United Kingdom quota to foreign boats—and quota was sold to the highest bidder. We will take no lessons from the party that created discord with our nearest neighbours in Europe to cover its own incompetence.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Rhoda Grant:** That party sold out our fishing industry and now seeks to conflate national security with economic benefit.

I move amendment S6M-17360.1, to leave out from “expresses” to end and insert:

“recognises that the upcoming UK-EU Summit will cover a range of issues as all sides look to build a stable and positive relationship that aligns with the national interest; notes that no agreements have been reached and therefore speculation is not helpful; further notes that the UK Government has stated that there is no link between fish and defence and that it would be wrong to suggest otherwise; acknowledges that the UK Labour administration has always been clear that it will protect the interests of UK fisheries; believes that the UK has long been a leader in the defence and security of the European continent and should stand ready to negotiate a security and defence partnership agreement with the EU; further believes that Scotland's domestic fishing industry is a significant contributor to the economy, particularly in many of the island and rural communities, and must, therefore, be protected, and calls on the Scottish Government to reform quota allocation via local authorities to ensure a sustainable fisheries future for communities and biodiversity.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Ariane Burgess, who joins us remotely.

16:49

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** Scotland's seas and the communities that rely on them are at a critical juncture, and the



climate crisis has heated our oceans, and will continue to do so, destabilising and damaging the building blocks that entire ecosystems rely on, and ultimately harming the livelihoods of fishers.

At the same time, Government is failing to adjust to this new reality and to deliver a viable future for the industry. We are already seeing the consequences of that situation. According to recent official statistics, 326 jobs on Scottish fishing vessels were lost between 2022 and 2023, and that came on top of the loss of almost 200 vessels in the North East and Highlands and Islands regions between 2008 and 2022. The loss of just one vessel is enough to impact an entire community, so the human cost of the loss of 200 in little more than a decade is devastating for Scotland, not just in a social sense but economically.

That situation should concern us all and it tells us something about the status quo: it simply is not working—not for fishers, not for communities and not for our precious seas. Neither today’s motion nor the amendments to it address that adequately. We urgently need to move from an extraction-based economy to a sustainable and regenerative one. The motion and amendments all still back extraction at all costs, but that offers a boom-and-bust scenario in which we fish, fish and fish until there is nothing left.

I share the concern in the Conservative motion that the UK Government plans to give the EU multiyear access to our fish stocks. Although the current annual system of negotiations is onerous, it allows a near constant assessment of fish stocks. Those stocks could be under serious strain and could face decimation if there is no on-going process of evaluation.

However, where I cannot support Tim Eagle’s motion is where it gets into the weeds of Brexit. The Conservatives seemingly want to blame the common fisheries policy for all the ills of the fishing industry, yet they conveniently forget that a Conservative UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, largely based the UK Fisheries Act 2020 on the very same policy that they are trashing today. It would be more helpful to fishers if we focused on the delivery of the duties that are contained in that act, which is where I turn to the Scottish Government.

Although I agree that Parliament should have an annual debate on the issue and that Scotland needs a seat at the fisheries table, I do not accept that the blame for the damage to our fishing sector sits entirely with the UK Government. For years, we have had a series of ministers tell this Parliament that fisheries management is complex. That is being used as an excuse not to do the hard yards required to deliver the change that is needed. The Scottish Government spends £80

million a year on the marine space and fisheries. Where is the money going if it is not being used to overcome the complexities that stand in the way of change?

The Scottish Greens want a clear-cut policy that delivers for fishers and for the environment that they operate in, which is why we want science to lead policy and a quota system that promotes low-impact fishing techniques and benefits Scotland’s communities, and why we want the EU, the UK and Scotland to come together to properly address overfishing. In that way, we can deliver for coastal communities, the environment and the economy.

16:53

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I am delighted that Tim Eagle is following my lead in bringing a fishing debate to the chamber. Members will recall that, in February, I brought the first fisheries debate to Holyrood since 2022. The Scottish Government has simply not allowed for enough opportunities to speak on all that impacts our important fishing sector. I welcome calls for an annual debate on fisheries, although the sector is worthy of more than just one Government debate a year, especially considering the significance of sustainable fisheries to Scotland’s economy and coastal communities.

We should recognise that we are talking about a high-protein, low-carbon food staple that is caught around our coast in what is one of the world’s most dangerous industries, and that it contributes significantly to food security. Fishing is also of cultural and social significance at home in Shetland. It is important that we enable the generations of family ties to fishing to continue into the future. We have already lost many such ties as well as vessels in the fleet due to policy decisions.

Scottish Liberal Democrats will not support the Conservative motion. We will not oppose the Labour amendment. Although I note the clarification on the link with defence, which I will expand on shortly, we are disappointed by the fact that that amendment would remove from the motion the line about an annual debate. We will support the Scottish Government’s amendment.

The Conservative motion refers to the relationship between the UK and the EU. Last week, my Westminster colleague Alistair Carmichael sought assurances that there would be “no linkage” between current negotiations with the EU on security and defence and those around future access to fisheries. During Cabinet Office questions in the House of Commons, the minister responsible for negotiations confirmed that there will be no such link, which is a commitment that he will be held to account for.

It is critical that we listen to those in the fishing industry who feel that, over the decades, they have been sold out by successive UK Governments—most recently, by the botched Boris Brexit deal in 2021, which brought in new trade barriers. That is why Westminster colleagues—

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

**Beatrice Wishart:** I am sorry, but I have no time.

That is why Westminster colleagues who are in the all-party parliamentary group on fisheries, which is co-chaired by Alistair Carmichael MP, have launched a call for evidence from the fishing industry and related stakeholders on their priorities for future fishing arrangements with the EU ahead of 2026, when the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement will be reviewed and the adjustment period on fisheries will end.

Cutting red tape on trade with the EU with a sanitary and phytosanitary agreement would benefit the sector. After announcing polling data, which showed strong public support for the sector, ahead of the UK-EU summit in London on 19 May, Elspeth Macdonald, chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, said:

"The Scottish public are crystal clear—our fishing industry must not be sold short again."

She continued:

"This poll confirms that Scots understand the value of fishing to our economy, our coastal communities and our national food security—and they expect their governments to stand up for those interests."

Given that the Scottish public is clearly supportive, those in our fishing sector must no longer be made to feel that policies are being enacted, with little or no consultation, that are to the detriment of their livelihoods.

I have long held and raised concerns about the resourcing of the Scottish Government's marine directorate given all that it is asked to do, from patrolling Scotland's waters to research and analysing data. Concerns continue that the landings at Scottish ports by non-UK vessels are not being effectively scrutinised, at the expense of the Scottish fleet and accurate scientific data.

As we increase at-sea infrastructure and transition away from legacy fuels, a better communications channel is needed for discussions about the impacts of offshore wind developments on traditional fishing grounds and nursery areas. I urge greater engagement between stakeholders, the Scottish Government and local fishing fleets about the realities of spatial squeeze in order to ensure the future of Scotland's important fishing sector.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate.

16:57

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** The motion is clear: it is a call to safeguard our coastal communities. Reports that the UK Labour Government might agree to a deal with the EU that enhances access for EU fishing vessels in UK waters are deeply concerning. Such a deal, which could result in multiyear access guarantees, threatens to undermine our fishing industry's very future. Scotland's fishing industry is hugely significant as it not only contributes to our national economy but also sustains our coastal towns and villages, and it is imperative that every effort is made to support the industry during trade negotiations.

The existing fisheries deal between the EU and the UK, while not perfect, took our sector out of the hated CFP and has delivered increased access for UK fishermen to UK waters. The agreement for 2025 has secured 150,000 tonnes of fishing opportunities for the UK. That represents a 15,000 tonne increase on 2024 and it ensures sustainable fishing practices and the long-term viability of the UK fishing industry.

However, the new deal that is potentially being proposed by the UK Labour Administration represents a backward step for the sector, which we cannot allow to happen. Elspeth Macdonald, chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, has pointed out the absurdity of the UK Government caving in to French demands for multiyear fisheries deals with fixed quotas. Such deals are not just a betrayal of our fishing industry; they are a betrayal of our national interests.

Public support for our industry is overwhelming. Today, a Scottish Fishermen's Federation poll revealed that nearly nine out of 10 Scots believe that the UK should definitively control which vessels fish in its waters, and more than 80 per cent believe that the EU fleet should not be granted continued access to UK fishing grounds without tangible benefits being returned to Scottish skippers and crews. That means that 80 per cent of the people in this nation expect both of their Governments to stand up for those interests. The poll also shows that 86 per cent of Scots believe that any future UK-EU fisheries deal should place Scotland's fishing industry at its heart. Younger Scots are often perceived as being more Eurocentric, but 65 per cent of them believe that Scotland's fishing industry should be prioritised in any future UK-EU agreement.

Scotland's fishing industry lands two thirds of all the fish and shellfish that are caught in the UK each year, which makes it the UK's powerhouse of

seafood production. My home town of Kirkcudbright has been the centre of the Scottish scallop industry, with West Coast Sea Products leading the way.

We must not overlook the importance of inshore fishing opportunities. Last week, when my colleague Tim Eagle and I met fishermen in Galloway, one of the topics that we discussed was cockle fishing—I can already see the cabinet secretary cringing. Before cockle fishing was prohibited by the SNP Government, at its peak in the early 1990s, the Solway produced more than 5,000 tonnes of cockles every year, which were worth more than £5 million to the local economy.

In 2023, SeaScope Fisheries Research Ltd, in partnership with others including the University of Glasgow and Marine Scotland science, carried out research on cockle stocks. The results have been very positive and a sustainable plan has been produced with partners from across business, academia and environmental organisations, but there has still not been a satisfactory response from the marine directorate on the next steps to reopen the fisheries. Perhaps the cabinet secretary will meet those representatives, or perhaps she will pull a cockle out of the bag today by informing us how we can move forward. The SNP has failed to make significant progress on improving inshore fisheries management, with the lack of scientific assessments hindering the development of these valued resources.

The EU must follow through on the treaty that it signed in 2020, which states that, after 2026, the issue of access to waters will become part of the annual negotiations on fisheries between the UK and the EU. Annual negotiations are the international norm. If EU states want to keep benefiting from our rich fishing grounds, that access must deliver clear and lasting benefits to Scotland's fisheries.

The Parliament must express its deep concern at the reported deal and stand firm in protecting Scotland's fishing industry. Let us have an annual debate on fisheries to highlight the sector's importance to Scotland's economy and ensure that our fishing industry, both offshore and inshore, is not only protected but championed as a vital sector.

17:02

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** It is hard to talk about fishing and the industry as a whole without talking about Brexit, so I found it quite insulting that, at the beginning of the debate, it was said that SNP members might raise Brexit. Let me tell members: £100 million was lost in the first month of Brexit, people lost their livelihoods, families lost their incomes and

coastal communities are struggling. All that such comments do is to invalidate that. Let us talk about the issues and find a solution, but let us stop the politicising.

I represent one of Scotland's most iconic fishing communities, so I know only too well the frustrations there. I talk to fishers, too. I represent Fraserburgh, Peterhead, Macduff and Buckie, and it is not just about economic activity.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** When Karen Adam speaks to those fishermen—as we do, too—how many tell her that they want Scotland to go back into the CFP, as the SNP wants?

**Karen Adam:** I will tell you what they say—you are welcome to join me in the discussions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please speak through the chair.

**Karen Adam:** They say that that argument is wearing thin, that the mask has worn off and that they know that it was the UK Government that was representing them at the table in negotiations and making bum deals.

Today's debate matters, but we need more than debates to protect the industry—we need clear-eyed realism and workable solutions. The fishing industry is about more than boats and quotas; it includes processors, engineers, harbour staff, lorry drivers, environmental officers, night watchmen and many others, who all work hand in glove. We cannot talk about supporting the sector while ignoring infrastructure and the people who keep it going.

I will support the Scottish Government's amendment because it reflects something that the motion misses: decisions about Scotland's waters are still being made without proper consultation with the Scottish Government. I was really sad to hear Tim Eagle say that he did not think that we would be competent enough to negotiate on our own.

**Finlay Carson:** Will Karen Adam give way?

**Karen Adam:** I will, although I have a lot to get through.

**Finlay Carson:** It is all very well talking about the UK Government, but what is the Scottish Government doing to support inshore fisheries if it completely ignores the opportunities that we have with sea bass, cockles and extending lobster fishing? The marine directorate has done nothing in the past few years to assist the inshore fishers.

**Karen Adam:** I will carry on with my speech, but if the member wants me to go into that, I am quite happy—I am sure that the minister will be, too—to talk to him about that after the debate.

The UK Government looks set to negotiate a multiyear access deal with the EU. Again, Scotland risks being left out of the room, which follows a pattern set by both Labour and Conservative Governments in London. I understand that the UK Government is thinking about the UK as a whole, but that is the problem. We were told that Brexit was about taking back control, but that control did not come to Scotland—it stayed in London, which is as far away geographically as it is from understanding what the fishers of the north-east actually need.

The motion focuses on what Labour might do, but it ignores what the Conservatives did. It was the Tories who negotiated that deal. Labour might be carrying the baton, but it was the Conservatives who handed it to them.

Tim Eagle should perhaps have a word with his colleagues at Aberdeenshire Council, because local decisions matter, too. Conservative-led Aberdeenshire Council removed the night watchman service at Macduff harbour. It did not just cut a post; it put vessels, property and lives at risk. Members cannot claim to be protecting the fishing industry in Parliament while stripping its support on the ground.

As convener of the cross-party group on fisheries and coastal communities, I have worked with stakeholders across the board and I have invited members from all parties to contribute, because if we want support for our fishers, we need to act and not just speak. I am here to represent them and I want not just warm words but fair outcomes. I am willing to work across parties to make that happen for the benefit of the people in my constituency of Banffshire and Buchan Coast. Debates are good, but what we really need is real power in the hands of Scottish fishers.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I appreciate the emotion in the debate, but I give a gentle reminder about the language that is used.

17:06

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I will not use any words such as “bum”, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is not a good start, Ms Hamilton.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Our fishing industry is caught between two Governments who consider it an afterthought or a chip to be bargained away to suit their political interests. Just like those of the SNP, Labour’s ambitions to do deals and cosy up with the EU put the future of our fishing industry at serious risk. The latest data shows that Scottish vessels landed £683 million-worth of sea fish and shellfish in 2023, which represents an increase of

16 per cent compared with 2019. However, the size of our fleet is currently in decline and employment on Scottish vessels has fallen by 13 per cent since 2014. Whose fault is that?

Labour’s reported deal with the EU to hand away multiyear access to UK fishing waters will put further pressures on our Scottish fishing industry. In February, Elspeth Macdonald from the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation stated:

“The UK now has the opportunity to do fisheries management better than the EU—more practical and appropriate to the UK situation. Any concessions on this that would suck the UK back into even the outer reaches of the CFP’s orbit would be a significantly backward step.”

**Rhoda Grant:** Does Rachael Hamilton not recognise that fish do not know boundaries? We must work with our neighbours to manage fishing stocks; we cannot simply go at it alone.

**Rachael Hamilton:** I do realise that. I have Eyemouth in my constituency and I know how fish move. However, the Scottish Conservatives have not cosied up to the EU and we will not do that. We have no intention of going back into the CFP. We want autonomy for Scottish fishermen and we want to support them, because the sector is hugely important in Scotland.

I fully support the UK’s ability to determine its own fisheries management arrangements in UK waters. Any deal that puts that principle at risk would represent a betrayal of our status as an independent coastal state. We must ensure that any negotiations regarding fishing rights or defence remain separate and that there is no linkage between fisheries and access to markets. I wonder whether Anas Sarwar needs to stand up to President Macron a bit more rather than sidling up to Keir Starmer, who clearly wants to butter up the EU.

Labour has also removed ring-fenced Scottish funding for agriculture and fisheries. In typical fashion, the SNP showed its disdain for fishing communities by taking that as an opportunity to cut funding to the marine directorate budget in real terms between 2024-25 and 2025-26. It is not only the Labour Government that the fishing industry has to put up with.

**Mairi Gougeon:** Perhaps Rachael Hamilton will welcome the increase to the marine directorate’s budget for the current financial year.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Of course I welcome an increase to the marine directorate’s budget, but the damage has already been done, cabinet secretary. Those decisions were weak. You were at the cabinet table at the time and you should have stood up for the Scottish fishing industry. I could not have said that in any other way, Deputy Presiding Officer.

It was only after strong lobbying from the industry and the Scottish Conservatives that the SNP and the Greens were forced into a rapid U-turn on highly protected marine areas. The HPMA's would have shut off 50 per cent of our Scottish seas and decimated the industry. However, despite that U-turn and the strength of the voice from the industry, the SNP is now trying to bring in HPMA's through the back door.

The SFF has also warned that the industry risks being crushed by the so-called spatial squeeze. That is having a massive impact on fishing, and the regulation of offshore wind projects and marine conservation measures are putting pressure on Scottish fleets.

As my colleagues have highlighted, the polling is clear. Four in five Scots believe that the EU should not be granted continued access to UK fishing rights. We are the only party that is defending the fishing sector in Scotland.

17:11

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** It is appropriate that the Conservative Party has brought forward a debate on the damage that can be caused if you have a botched deal with the EU, because, frankly, it is well qualified in delivering such bad deals. Not content with wrecking our economy through their economic illiteracy, nor with putting party before country by calling the EU referendum in the first place, the Tories went on to deliver a Brexit deal that broke every single promise that they made to the fishing industry. Fishers were promised a sea of opportunity. What they got was a wave of betrayal—red tape, export chaos and continued EU access to UK waters, without a meaningful better deal for our own fleet. Under Boris Johnson, the Fisheries Act 2020 was passed—a law that is, frankly, not far removed from the common fisheries policy that the Tories now say they oppose. How dare Conservative MSPs pretend to champion Scotland's fisheries when their party was the one that sold out the sector.

Our fishing communities from Peterhead to Eyemouth are vital to Scotland's rural and island economies. In 2023, Scottish vessels landed more than £683 million-worth of seafood. I want to see that grow further, but many of those communities remain in areas of multiple deprivation under the Scottish index of multiple deprivation. Why? Because the wealth is not fairly shared. The outdated fixed quota allocation system allows a handful of big businesses to dominate while smaller fishers and coastal communities lose out. Section 25 of the UK Fisheries Act 1998 says that quotas should be distributed on the basis of

“environmental, social and economic factors.”

However, the Scottish Government still relies on a system that ignores compliance history, it fails to incentivise low-impact fishing and it overlooks illegal practices such as illegal discards, modern slavery and human trafficking.

In Annan in my region, victims were exploited aboard fishing vessels in a case that exposed the gaping lack of due diligence. When I asked the cabinet secretary in a number of written questions what checks had been done before the awarding of quotas or grants, the answer was that the Government was

“continuing to look into this matter”.—[*Written Answers*, 7 October 2024; S6W-30076.]

That is not good enough. No business involved in abuse or illegality should be given access to our shared public resources, whether through financial support in the form of grants or valuable fishing quotas.

We need reform. Quotas and grants should come with conditions to protect biodiversity, drive sustainability, protect workers and support local economies. The way in which we allocate quotas arguably has as much impact as the level of the quota that we negotiate. However, we need better relationships with our neighbours to get the best deal for our fishers. That means building a stable and grown-up relationship with the EU, not one that is based on the paranoia and point-scoring of the Tories. There is absolutely no basis for media speculation on a link between fisheries and defence in current talks between the UK and the EU—that is what prompted this debate.

Scotland's fishing industry deserves better.

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

**Colin Smyth:** I think that I need to wind up.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is concluding.

**Colin Smyth:** We need serious leadership, not crocodile tears from the party that is responsible for many of the failures that are affecting the industry today. We should have had a debate about how we can use the extensive powers that the Parliament has to stand up for our fishers, reform the system and deliver a sustainable, long-term future for a sector that is vital to Scotland's economy.

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

17:15

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I agree with Tim Eagle's expressing of concern about the UK Labour Government's attitude to our fishing industry. I fear that Scotland's fleet will

again be hammered as a result of deals done by Whitehall behind closed doors. However, the only reason that those negotiations are happening at all is that Mr Eagle's former leader at Westminster gambled Scotland's fisheries and every other sector in our economy on a one-armed bandit Brexit referendum, only to lose and then swan off into the sunset, while his successors carried out the act of dragging Scotland out of Europe against our democratic will. They also did a Brexit deal with the European Union that ended nearly five decades of international co-operation.

Boris Johnson's trade and co-operation agreement means that a quarter of the existing EU fishing quota in UK and Scottish waters will transfer to the UK in a period of just over five years. To put it another way, which I am sure that the Tories will squeal about from sedentary positions, despite the UK's withdrawal from the EU and the Tories' mantra of taking back control and all their hot air and yitterin on and bletherin about the benefits of Brexit—we must pay heed to the fact that not all fishers wanted Brexit; as I understand it, inshore fishers were pretty much opposed to it—the EU fleet will retain 75 per cent of its quota in UK and Scottish waters, while the UK Government has zero say on the common fisheries policy. In addition, from next year, the UK Government will have to negotiate fresh access and share of quota agreements with the EU every year. Westminster is desperately trying to avoid having to do annual negotiations and is instead setting up multiyear agreements.

The Tories have got what they wanted—the Brexit that they hold so dear. Mr Eagle comes to the chamber and tries to hoodwink skippers in the fishing industry into believing that his party is on their side. Was the common fisheries policy perfect? Of course not. One of Scotland's major barriers to fairness under the CFP was the complete inertia and apathy shown by the UK Government every time quotas and take rates were up for negotiation.

**Tim Eagle:** Does the member accept that the SNP's policy would be to take us back into the CFP? Given that the CFP is a treaty, how would the SNP be able to negotiate with France and Spain to get a better deal than the one that we had before? Most of the fishermen I speak to want to be out of the CFP.

**Emma Harper:** I welcome the member's suggestion that Scotland would have its own voice at the table and would be able to negotiate for itself as a normal independent country.

We know that the CFP wasnae perfect, and we know that one of the barriers under the CFP was the UK Government's complete inertia; I have just covered that. That did not affect only Scottish fishermen—just ask the former skippers of

Grimsby and the Humber, who were sold out by the UK Government decades ago, or the fishermen of Cornwall, who have seen the supply chains to their most profitable markets in France and Spain torn asunder by Brexit and the Tory omnishambles that was set in train by Boris Johnson.

I recommend that members read the Politico article headlined, "How Brexit Betrayed the UK Fishing Industry". I will give a flavour of what it says about how supportive Tim Eagle's colleagues were of our fishermen:

"When Johnson cited a rise in the numbers of Dover sole UK trawlers could catch, fishermen pointed out this meant little to the Scottish industry, given the species are primarily found in southern UK waters. 'He wasn't across the details,' said an attendee ... 'He just could not comprehend that we weren't happy.'"

We are talking about a UK Tory Prime Minister who could not comprehend the needs of a Scottish industry and Scottish workers. I am shocked.

The Scottish fishing industry deserves this Parliament's support. It is time for Labour to be honest about the damage that the hard Brexit has done and to stand up for Scottish fishing. Of course, the SNP will do the very same.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches.

17:19

**Ariane Burgess:** We have heard many useful and colourful contributions today. I am pleased to note the widespread agreement that the annual fisheries debate needs to be restored.

I will refer to a couple of points that we heard in the debate. I particularly appreciate Karen Adam's impassioned point about the effect of Brexit on our coastal communities, the broken promises and the devastating impact that Brexit has had on many people's lives. Colin Smyth talked about how too many coastal communities are in areas of multiple deprivation. In the light of those points, I urge the Scottish Government to act: to use its devolved powers to protect our seas and fishers, and to press the UK Government and the EU to be more responsible in how they approach negotiations.

Scotland already has the powers to do a fair bit to change the status quo. At present, it puts quota in the hands of a small number of businesses that have to meet only a small number of obligations. The Government needs to learn from the agricultural sector and to make sure that we use public assets to incentivise the changes that we want to see—using them not just for pockets but for people and planet.

We need to put an end to bycatch. Every day, large volumes of fish and other marine wildlife are

killed and then chucked back into the sea. That damaging system needs to end. We can solve the problem by promoting low-impact fishing systems and introducing tighter regulations and harsher penalties. It is the Government's legal duty to end bycatch; failing to act is simply not an option.

We also need the Scottish Government to deliver on its legal duty to protect marine habitats. I have lost track of the number of commitments made by SNP ministers to protect marine protected areas and the habitats outside them. Their promises, and the law, are crystal clear on this: action is needed to reduce the harms caused by certain fishing practices—namely, scallop dredging and bottom trawling.

The time for promises is over. Now it is time for long-overdue action. Scotland's seas are an asset that can provide Scotland with huge social and economic benefits, but years of inaction and legislative failure have resulted in severe harm and a drastic decline in our marine environment. That is holding us back from meeting our nature and climate targets. It is costing fishers jobs and ripping communities apart. A well-managed marine environment would reverse all those trends and guarantee a sustainable future for Scotland's marine environment and for all the communities that depend on it.

17:22

**Rhoda Grant:** I start by making a point of clarification in response to Beatrice Wishart's speech. She was concerned that our amendment to the motion appears to take out the reference to an annual debate. It does take out that reference, but the point that Ms Wishart herself made was that one annual debate does not cut it. There is more than one facet to the fishing industry, so we need more than one debate—we need to look at how we add value to the processing industry, how we distribute quota and how we look at spatial planning. Karen Adam mentioned a lot more parts of the downstream industry. One annual set-piece debate does not deal with that.

We need to put a focus on the industry and all its parts to make sure that we maximise the benefit. That focus has been lacking and I hope that we will get it back, especially in relation to things such as spatial planning. It must be a priority when we are thinking about renewables and many of the other issues that we are dealing with in relation to the marine environment.

There is no deal, but a deal needs to be negotiated and it needs to be for the benefit of the fishing industry and the communities that the industry supports. We would expect trading in fish to be made easier—that is another thing that Beatrice Wishart talked about. The way in which

the current deals are set up creates huge disadvantages for our fishing communities, which need to be sorted out. We look forward to seeing that happen. I hope that the Scottish fishing industry will be at the heart of that process, which will also involve the Scottish Government.

Members talked about research. We know that our research needs to be improved, and the marine laboratory needs investment. Some members of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee visited the laboratory, and it looked pretty much like an old shed. It was not a place for cutting-edge science.

Ariane Burgess talked about climate change, which brings concerns, and we need to do research into the difficulties that it will bring. However, it also brings opportunities. As fisheries change, we need to be fleet of foot. We need to protect stocks while we get ready for new opportunities.

Colin Smyth talked about quotas and grants. He was very clear—and I absolutely agree—that boats that break the law should not be given quota, and neither should they be given grants. Boats that disregard the law, boats that trade in black fish and those that deal in modern-day slavery: those are all abhorrent, and such practices should not be part of our fishing industry.

We need to reform how we distribute quota to ensure that biodiversity is taken into account and that we protect species. Those with access to our community quota need to use it in the public interest and to employ people fairly.

The Conservatives brought this debate, and most of the issues in it have arisen because of Boris's botched Brexit bill. That makes trading difficult, and we need to sort that out. The debate is based on a false premise, having been initiated by a party that, to quote Colin Smyth, promised "a sea of opportunity" but delivered "a wave of betrayal".

17:26

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** The global and geopolitical outlook that we face today has truly exposed the incredible act of self-harm that this Government and the people of Scotland always knew Brexit to be. The force of global economic volatility and the spectre of US tariffs simply reinforce more than ever the importance of Scotland having the security, stability and opportunity that come with European Union membership.

Scotland paid a heavy price for a Brexit that it did not vote for, and that affected the fishing sector worse than many others. Salmon Scotland

reported that Brexit cost Scotland around £75 million in 2023 in lost salmon exports to the European Union, and farming companies face increased red tape and costs. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation described the Brexit deal as "desperately poor" and said that it generated

"huge disappointment and a great deal of anger"

about the

"failure to deliver on promises made repeatedly to this industry."

Although I welcome the UK Government's stated intention to improve relations with the European Union—and the Scottish Government will continue to engage proactively to seek improvements that can benefit Scottish people and traders—I deeply regret the fact that Scottish businesses, including those in the fishing sector, are no longer part of the largest single market and customs union on earth and no longer have the many benefits that come with freedom of movement within the EU.

**Tim Eagle:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Angus Robertson:** I have to make some progress, but I will come to Mr Eagle's comments in a moment.

The fishing community finds itself in a predicament made for it by the UK Government, and the UK Government has severely limited the scope for progress by the red lines that it has set itself for negotiating with the EU. The interests of Scotland are best served as an independent nation and member state of the European Union.

Coming now to individual contributions, I will start with that of Tim Eagle, who began by acknowledging that the TCA negotiated by the Conservative UK Government did not deliver for fishing communities. It is a shame that he did not apologise for his party's sell-outs. We should never forget that it was the Conservatives who signed the UK up to the common fisheries policy.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Angus Robertson:** I will make some progress. My cabinet secretary colleague Mairi Gougeon updated the Parliament on cancelled meetings with her UK Government opposite number. I hope that that will be rectified as a priority. Sadly, that reminds us more of poor relations with the previous UK Government—not one that is committed to a genuine reset with Europe and with the devolved Administrations.

Rhoda Grant rightly warned about suggesting that fishing agreements have been reached. I am not aware of that being the case—it would be good if true—but I would welcome it if she

encouraged her UK colleagues at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to meet representatives of the Scottish Government.

Ariane Burgess pointed to a loss of fishing sector jobs since Brexit, which should concern us all. Beatrice Wishart underlined the contribution of the fisheries sector in Shetland and Scottish coastal communities. She raised something that I think has been missing in the debate: the importance of an agriculture, food and drink agreement—a sanitary and phytosanitary, or SPS, agreement—which, as I hope everybody across the chamber would agree, would be a beneficial part of the reset with the European Union that is being negotiated.

Karen Adam reminded members about the scope of the sector and the needs of the fishing communities that she so ably represents. Emma Harper reminded members how badly the fisheries sector is understood both by Tories and by the Labour Party.

In summary, it is beyond debate that key promises that were made during Brexit have not been delivered and that Brexit has had significant impacts on Scotland's marine sector and our coastal and island communities. The Scottish Government will continue to represent the sector's interests as it presses the United Kingdom Government to move ever closer in its relationship with the European Union until such time as we can, once and for all, reverse the folly of Brexit and rejoin the European Union as an independent member state.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Jamie Halcro Johnston to wind up.

17:30

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am sorry that the cabinet secretary did not take my intervention, because I was going to point out to him that 5 May is a very special day for us, because it is the date on which he and I stood against each other in the general election. Who would have thought, nearly 20 years ago, that we would both be in this place, with me representing a party that took us out of the CFP and him representing one that wants to take us back in.

I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests.

I am pleased to be able to close what has been an important debate on the future of Scottish fishing—an industry that is vital and so ingrained in many of the communities that I represent across the Highlands and Islands, including Mallaig, on Skye, and in Orkney, where I live, as well as in



Shetland, which Tim Eagle and I visited only last month and where we spoke with the local sector.

As Tim Eagle and other members have highlighted, the Scottish Conservatives have chosen to use our business time today to bring a fishing debate to the chamber in Holyrood, after the SNP Scottish Government failed to do so. There has not been such a debate for two years, and it is clear from the many contributions today that that is a shameful failure by the SNP. Its amendment actually supports calls for an annual debate, which raises a question that could be asked of the SNP in many areas: why the delay?

Our fishing industry is a vital employer in our coastal and island communities, and it supports many local jobs and livelihoods, both directly and indirectly, across my region. However, the industry faces a number of challenges, some of which were raised with us when we were in Shetland as well as in meetings with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. Most pressing are reports that the UK Labour Administration seems to be prepared to bow to pressure from the French Government and sell out Scotland's fishermen for access to EU funding. If that is true, it really would be a betrayal of our fishermen, giving away access to our waters and our fish just to appease a French President who appears to be shamefully exploiting European security concerns for his own ends.

Reacting to reports of a deal, James Anderson, chairman of the Shetland Fishermen's Association, said:

"If true, this report is more or less suggesting that the UK returns to being in the much-maligned Common Fisheries Policy ... with a multi-annual deal condemning us to fixed quotas year after year.

Ministers clearly haven't got a clue about the impact on Scottish fishing grounds—and the people whose livelihoods depend on them—or they would not be agreeing to this as a way forward. Food security should be part of our national security, and the interests of one industry should not be traded off against those of another, no matter how small."

Labour's amendment claims that no agreements have been reached and that, therefore, "speculation is not helpful". Well, it is perhaps not helpful for Labour—and can we take the party at its word? Ahead of last year's general election, Keir Starmer told farmers that

"food security is national security"

and reassured them that they had his support, saying that

"losing a farm is not like losing any other business – it can't come back."

Labour was right behind our farmers, he suggested, and then he betrayed them by introducing Labour's family farm tax. Labour went from supporting farmers to cutting the legs from underneath them—they will just have to

"learn to do more with less",

Labour said. Farmers have learned to their cost that they cannot trust Labour, and fishermen may be about to learn the same.

The SNP's amendment is as expected. It cuts out any awkward references to the common fisheries policy, clearly in the hope that Scottish fishermen will somehow forget that the SNP's obsession with breaking up the UK and rejoining the EU would also mean rejoining the common fisheries policy. The SNP is desperate to hand back control of our seas and our fish to bureaucrats in Brussels.

**Karen Adam:** Can the member tell us how Brexit has remedied the situation through our coming out of the CFP?

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** We were just talking about the opportunities that have been presented to us that I think Labour will throw away, but I will come to that later.

Leaving the CFP has been positive, but I also recognise, as did Tim Eagle, the industry's concerns about the limitations of the deal that was agreed with the EU when we left. That brings me to some of the other contributions in the debate. Tim Eagle rightly recognised the concerns of some in the fishing industry—concerns that were raised with me at the time, as the party's lead on fishing when we left the EU—that the trade and co-operation agreement that was signed with the EU did not meet the expectations of many in the sector. Mr Eagle is also right that it delivered two important things: we left the hated CFP and we built in an opportunity to get a better deal in 2026-27. That is what Labour now threatens

The threat is from the SNP, too, because, if it has its way, it will back the CFP, as I have just mentioned. As Rachael Hamilton reminded us, SNP ministers in the Parliament, egged on by Fergus Ewing's favourite nationalist colleagues, the Greens, planned to bring in HPMA's, which would have shut 50 per cent of Scottish seas and decimated our coastal communities. Thankfully, after pressure from members on the Conservative benches, the industry and local communities, the SNP was forced to U-turn, although the threat of HPMA's being introduced by the back door remains.

Finlay Carson highlighted the historic importance of his local cockle fishing industry, which particularly resonated with me. Time and time again, local fisheries close or are blocked because of questionable science or prevaricating ministers. That is certainly the case with the closure of the Clyde cod box. A derogation for Shetland fishermen to catch squid was not granted because—I will paraphrase a response that I received—there was not enough evidence to allow

it, but there also was not enough evidence to reject it. Valuable local fisheries, often worth millions of pounds to local economies, are being lost—sometimes year after year—because of decisions that have been based on questionable science or because decisions have not been made at all.

**Finlay Carson:** Does my colleague agree with me that, perhaps the reason that we have not had a fisheries debate in the chamber is not because the SNP does not like to give up the chance to kick the UK Government, but because it would absolutely fail to defend its position in support of its inshore fisheries and the devolved fisheries regulations that it is wholly responsible for? The party has let the fishing industry down since it came to power.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** The member will not be surprised to hear that I agree with him wholeheartedly on that point—we have seen that time and time again.

Members have spoken about some of the other challenges that the industry faces, such as spatial squeeze, which is of increasing concern for many fishermen. However, the threat that the sector now faces from the Labour Government's potential deal with Brussels is grave. The deal would be a sell-out of local fishermen and our fishing communities. Polling that was released by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is clear: the Scottish public overwhelmingly believe that the EU's fishing fleet should not be allowed access to our waters without tangible benefits for Scotland's fishermen and our fishing industry.

By supporting the Scottish Conservatives' motion unamended at decision time, the Parliament can send a clear message that it opposes Labour's damaging deal; that it confirms its support for Scotland staying out of the CFP; that our future must be as an independent coastal state, not one that is controlled by the EU bureaucrats in Brussels; and that both of Scotland's Governments must get behind our fisheries sector and work together to deliver the bright future that we know that it can have.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on protecting Scotland's fishing industry.

## Business Motions

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

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-17377, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I call Jamie Hepburn to move the motion.

17:38

### **The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn):**

This motion adds a statement on the programme for government to the schedule for next week. Some members will be interested to know that, unlike in other years, there will be an opportunity to ask questions of the First Minister following his statement, which will be followed by a debate in the usual fashion. There will be another programme for government debate the following day.

Members may also like to look further ahead and see that, in the following week, on 13 May, we will have a stage 1 debate on the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill. There will be Conservative Party business and Scottish Government business on the following days. That is probably as much information as I can extend on the business motion.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 6 May 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* First Minister's Statement: Programme for Government 2025-26

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Programme for Government 2025-26

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 7 May 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands;  
Health and Social Care

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate:  
Programme for Government: Building  
the Best Future for Scotland

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 Thursday 8 May 2025  
 11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 11.40 am General Questions  
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Social Justice  
*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Relationships and  
 Behaviour in Schools  
*followed by* Scottish Government Debate:  
 Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of  
 Victory in Europe (VE) Day  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
 Tuesday 13 May 2025  
 2.00 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)  
*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Assisted Dying for  
 Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Committee Announcements  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 6.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 Wednesday 14 May 2025  
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Constitution, External Affairs and  
 Culture, and Parliamentary Business;  
 Justice and Home Affairs  
*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist  
 Party Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)  
 5.10 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 Thursday 15 May 2025  
 11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 11.40 am General Questions  
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business  
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Education and Skills  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 5 May 2025, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motions S6M-17378 to S6M-17381, on stage 1 timetables for bills. I call Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motions.

**Jamie Hepburn:** I am happy to move these motions rather more quickly than I moved the previous motion.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 21 November 2025.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 26 September 2025.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 31 October 2025.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 10 October 2025.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

*Motions agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:40

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-17382 and S6M-17383, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, S6M-17384, on designation of a lead committee, and S6M-17415, on committee meeting times.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security Information-sharing (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Education, Children and Young People Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament from 6.15 pm on Wednesday 30 April 2025.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

**The Presiding Officer:** The question on the motions will be put at decision time.

## Decision Time

17:40

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

I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Jim Fairlie is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Claire Baker will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-17362.4, in the name of Jim Fairlie, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17362, in the name of Sue Webber, on ending the war against Scotland's motorists, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

17:41

*Meeting suspended.*

17:44

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Jim Fairlie is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Claire Baker will fall.

We come to the vote on amendment S6M-17362.4, in the name of Jim Fairlie, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17362, in the name of Sue Webber, on ending the war against Scotland's motorists. Members should cast their votes now.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 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)  
 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)

Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

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)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 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)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 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)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-17362.4, in the name of Jim Fairlie, is: For 64, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The amendment in the name of Claire Baker therefore falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-17362, in the name of Sue Webber, on ending the war against Scotland's motorists, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)

Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (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]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-17362, in the name of Sue Webber, on ending the war against Scotland's motorists, as amended, is: For 79, Against 37, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament believes that language used out of context to maximise political traction and which fails to consider the sensitivities of such language is reckless, given wider global considerations; further believes that demonising car users is unhelpful to rural communities in particular, which, as a result of a deregulated bus market, often have no alternative to using a car; acknowledges, however, that Scotland needs to reduce carbon emissions from transport, especially from car use; welcomes that Scotland has reached its target of 6,000 public EV charge points two years early through a combination of Scottish Government funding, delivery by local authorities and private sector investment, with approximately 24,000 to be delivered by 2030 through continued Scottish Government funding and increasing private sector investment; recognises that supporting EV car use contributes to Scotland's connectivity, and further recognises the value that connectivity has in helping to support the economy, education, social mobility and leisure across Scotland; notes that connectivity is being enhanced by free bus travel for over two million people in Scotland, which provides alternatives to car usage for those that can make the switch; respects the responsibilities of local authorities for local road provision and maintenance, and some local bus services, and that they will be able to have more control through transport legislation, which puts more power into the hands of local transport authorities; is concerned at the ongoing impact of UK Conservative administrations' deregulation of bus services in the 1980s and 1990s; recognises the need for safe, clean and, importantly, reliable punctual bus services, which can be improved through bus infrastructure, and that improvements can be made in public health by creating low emission zones, as has been done in over 40 areas across Europe, but does have concerns that the punctuality of bus services can be hampered by road works; welcomes the Scottish

Government's approach through engaging collaboratively with the Scottish Road Works Commissioner, who oversees road works, with roads authorities, which have responsibility for coordination of works, and with the road works industry, which is responsible for duration and quality of works, to find reasonable solutions to help in this area; agrees that further investigation is needed of the role that those undertaking the works play in the quality of road surfaces after works have been completed; further agrees to await the results of the National Speed Management Review consultation, noting that an estimated 10mph reduction in the national speed limit on single carriageway roads can reduce deaths by 23% and serious casualties by 18%, and that there is a need to make Scotland's roads safer to cut the number of people being injured and killed on the roads, and welcomes the roll-out of 20mph limits across all local authorities on roads determined by them.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-17360.3, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17360, in the name of Tim Eagle, on protecting Scotland's fishing industry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 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)  
 Dorman, 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)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

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)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Doney, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 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)

#### Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
Greer, Ross (West 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-17360.3, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, is: For 65, Against 45, Abstentions 6.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-17360.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17360, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on protecting Scotland's fishing industry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

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

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect either. I would have voted yes.

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

I can confirm that Mr Allan's vote was recorded.

#### For

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

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (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)  
Dowey, 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)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
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)  
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
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)  
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)  
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)  
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)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)



Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-17360.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, is: For 17, Against 87, Abstentions 11.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-17360, in the name of Tim Eagle, on protecting Scotland's fishing industry, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 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)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

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)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 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)

#### Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Greer, Ross (West 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 motion S6M-17360, in the name of Tim Eagle, on protecting Scotland's fishing industry, as amended, is: For 65, Against 45, Abstentions 6.

#### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament expresses its deep concern at reports that the UK Labour administration may agree a deal on fishing with the EU that enhances access for EU fishing vessels to UK waters without consulting the Scottish Government, despite the fishing industry being of comparatively greater importance to the Scottish economy than to the UK economy as a whole; understands that the reported deal could result in a multi-year access guarantee as opposed to annual negotiations between the UK and the EU; notes the need for an agreement that delivers improvements for Scotland's fishing communities, including access to the single market for fish and seafood and long-term stability for fishing businesses; further notes the poor record of successive UK Conservative and Labour administrations in delivering for Scotland's coastal communities; calls on the UK Government to engage with fishing stakeholders and the Scottish Government to ensure that Trade and Cooperation Agreement renegotiations reflect the needs and priorities of the Scottish fishing industry; further calls on the UK Government to provide multi-annual funding that keeps pace with the equivalent EU funding that Scotland would have received as a member state, and that all marine funding be devolved; recognises the significant economic harm created by Brexit in reducing trade and access to labour for fishing businesses, and believes that there should be an annual debate on fisheries to highlight its importance to Scotland's economy.

**The Presiding Officer:** Unless any member objects, I propose to ask a single question on four Parliamentary Bureau motions.

As no member objects, the final question is, that motions S6M-17382 and S6M-17383, on approval

of Scottish statutory instruments, motion S6M-17384, on the designation of a lead committee, and motion S6M-17415, on committee meeting times, all in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

#### *Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security Information-sharing (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Education, Children and Young People Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament from 6.15 pm on Wednesday 30 April 2025.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

## Neonatal Care (Best Start Model)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-17186, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on the best start new model of neonatal care. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

I advise members that Jackie Baillie has lodged an amendment to the motion. Amendments to members' business motions are admissible, but are not taken in the chamber.

I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call Meghan Gallacher to open the debate.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the view that it is vitally important to ensure that the Best Start new model of neonatal care delivers the highest standards of care for the most vulnerable babies, including those in the Central Scotland region; further notes the view that implementation of this new model must prioritise the safety of babies, be underpinned by adequate and sustained funding, including for appropriate staffing levels, and include sufficient provision of overnight accommodation for parents on neonatal units; understands the view that families require reassurance that changes to services will improve outcomes and not compromise access to specialised care, and notes the calls for the Scottish Government to provide an update on progress towards implementation of the new model of neonatal care and a timescale for when the new model will be fully operational, to clarify whether there are any expected changes to the plans, as announced by the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health on 25 July 2023, and to set out how it will ensure that what it sees as these essential criteria, including provision of overnight accommodation, are met in line with its planned timescale.

17:55

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** Before I begin my remarks, I take the opportunity to thank the team at Bliss Scotland for working with me to lodge the motion in Parliament.

I first raised issues surrounding the best start new model of neonatal care back in September 2023. News had broken of the intention to downgrade Wishaw general hospital's neonatal department, in my region. That provoked a strong backlash from communities in Lanarkshire, especially from families who had received care and support from the award-winning team at the hospital.

A campaign group, led by the Wishaw neonatal warriors, has said that the plans would be "catastrophic" as expectant mums and their babies will need to travel to other hospitals to receive specialist care. The online petition has now surpassed 25,000 signatures, which is testament to the strength of feeling against this ill-thought-out decision.

At the time, I warned the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health that

"Lanarkshire mums ... are the feisty type",

and said that I knew that they would continue to fight against the downgrade

"every step of the way."—[*Official Report*, 20 September 2023; c 98.]

They will continue to have my support, as I do not believe that Government ministers have truly considered the lasting impact of this decision on parents and their newborn babies, nor does the national health service have the adequate or sustained staffing levels to achieve the new model of neonatal care.

The best start model was first introduced in 2017, yet, eight years on, the new model has not been fully implemented and the resources that are needed to implement it safely while providing support to families have not been delivered in full. There remains great uncertainty over when or how full implementation of the neonatal model, as confirmed by the minister in July 2023, will take place. That is simply not good enough.

One in seven babies in the United Kingdom require some level of neonatal care after birth, and the care that they receive is vital to their long-term health. Approximately 5,200 babies are admitted to neonatal units in Scotland each year, and the care that they receive is often life-saving, but it can also be deeply traumatic for babies and their families. Babies, who have just opened their eyes for the first time, not only are adapting to their new surroundings but are exposed to stress and pain as a result of requiring additional care.

One of the main issues that I wish to raise concerns facilities for parents. I have just mentioned how deeply traumatising neonatal care is for parents and babies, yet, moments after giving birth, mums are routinely separated from their babies for extended periods, as most hospitals do not provide sufficient facilities to enable parents to stay overnight. That is undoubtedly detrimental to the health of not just the newborn baby, but of worried parents, who just want to be close so that they can comfort their child. The lack of that early contact can disrupt bonding and heighten stress, with an impact on both emotional wellbeing and physical development such as breastfeeding initiation.

Why, therefore, do we not have overnight accommodation for parents on neonatal wards? It is not easy for parents having to travel long distances to stay with their baby in a hospital overnight, especially when more than one child is involved. Indeed, the Bliss families kept apart campaign in Scotland found that for one in every 10 babies who need to stay overnight on a unit,

there is only one room for a parent to stay with them. In 2025, that is scandalous.

Alternative arrangements are considered, but that usually comes at a cost to parents, who might not be able to afford to stay in a nearby hotel. There appear to be no solutions to provide parents with the reassurance that they will be able to stay by their newborn's side. Regardless of whether the Scottish Government continues with what I feel is the wrong move in downgrading neonatal departments across Scotland, it must still ensure that there is overnight accommodation to enable parents to stay with their babies. Otherwise, it is willingly advocating for the sickest newborn babies to be separated from their parents. That would be not only morally wrong, but unforgivable, should any parent learn of a deterioration in their baby's health without being close by.

Therefore, I call on the minister to commit today to ensuring that every hospital that is currently specialising in neonatal care has the appropriate accommodation for parents. That is essential for any new model of neonatal care. I cannot believe that we are even having this discussion today—it is just basic common sense.

The implementation of the best start model recommendations in the report "The Best Start—A Five-year Forward Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Care in Scotland" has been painfully slow. Even if people do not agree with all of those recommendations, the fact is that families who might be affected in the future—and, critically, the staff working in neonatal services departments across Scotland—deserve to know how long the new model will take to implement. If the Scottish Government is truly committed to providing high-quality care to the sickest babies, it needs to get a move on.

Ministers cannot continue to bury their heads in the sand over the downgrading of neonatal services. Regardless of whatever evidence they say has been produced, it is clear that communities are against the move, and ministers have ignored the fact that receiving care further from home can reduce parents' ability to be partners in their baby's care. In addition, ministers cannot overlook the need to ensure that overnight accommodation is provided to parents so that they can always be with their babies.

The minister must set out what the Government sees as essential criteria in the best start model, including adequate staffing provision, and the timescale for full implementation. Uncertainty causes alarm, and this debate provides an opportunity for the Scottish Government to outline those next steps today.

In my previous contribution on this topic, I said that the reason that I feel so passionately about the issue

"is because I am a mum."—[*Official Report*, 20 September 2023; c 96.]

I will continue to push the Scottish Government to improve neonatal services across Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. I call Clare Adamson, who joins us remotely.

18:02

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** The birth of a new baby is one of the most exciting times in a family. There is nothing more precious than the birth of a baby, and for parents and families, concerns for safety around that time are huge. As a mother and a step-grandmum, I understand those concerns only too well, and I share the concerns of my constituents in that regard. However, for people who have had to go through the most difficult experience of pre-term birth, when their hope is simply to celebrate a new family member, it must be heartbreaking, and I can only imagine their stress and worry.

I am very proud of the record of the team at the neonatal unit in University hospital Wishaw, in my constituency. The care and support offered during an acutely difficult and uncertain time is invaluable to families, so I know why the issue brings up such strong feelings and can be emotive.

Nevertheless, we have a responsibility not to add fuel to the fire of that anxiety. We all want the best outcomes for constituents, and for new families at an uncertain time. I know without a doubt that every one of my colleagues, whatever their party affiliation, wants the best for their constituents. As policy makers, however, we have to be guided by the evidence. We cannot ignore the clinical expertise; the Scottish Government cannot do so either, and nor should it.

I agree with many of Meghan Gallacher's points, and I know of her commitment in this area. I agree with the substantive points about implementation, and the need for assurance and certainty about the way forward. We all want a new model of care to have the very best standards, driven by clinical recommendations that seek the best life chances for babies, including the best chances for the sickest babies and for those for whom an early pre-term birth is predicted.

The clinical analysis with which we have all been presented shows that, in order to achieve the best outcomes for the small number of very premature babies, care is best delivered in units that regularly see the most complex cases and have ready access to specialist support services.

Without a doubt, the new model must be underpinned by adequate and sustainable funding, as must all our public health services. Providing reassurance to new parents is critical, too, and in that respect, issues such as overnight accommodation, access to specialist support and certainty that their baby will receive the best possible care will all be crucial to making a success of the new national model.

In 2017, the “Best Start” report was published, with recommendations on a new model of neonatal care based on the British Association of Perinatal Medicine’s definitions of levels of care, and proposals to move from the current model of eight neonatal intensive care units to a model of three units, supported by the continuation of the current units. That is important: the three specialist intensive care units are to be supported by the current neonatal units, including the one at Wishaw. It is a redesign of the system, and Wishaw will be designated as a local neonatal unit, still providing care for neonatal babies.

The three proposed neonatal intensive care units in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen are units that have already conducted specialist services, including neonatal surgery, which is not available at Wishaw, as it has neither the capacity nor the expertise to facilitate it. The redesign of services will not affect the vast majority of those attending the local prenatal unit at Wishaw.

In the example of Wishaw, the changes have been said to apply to a tiny minority of one or two babies per month, who are most at risk and whose survival chances would be improved in one of the three specialist units. All local neonatal units across Scotland will continue to provide that care for babies born later than 27 weeks.

The options appraisal happened in 2023, and the recommendations for the new neonatal model of care are underpinned by strong evidence that population outcomes for the most premature and sickest babies are improved by delivery and care in units that look after a critical mass of such babies. Under the new model of care, it is intended that mothers who it is suspected will have an extreme pre-term labour will be transferred before labour—and preferably before giving birth—to the maternity unit at one of the hospitals with intensive care expertise, allowing mother and baby to receive the best care.

We know that, practically, that will not always be possible, and reassurance based on other cases is vital. In the circumstances where that has not happened, a specialist neonatal transport—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Adamson, I must ask you to bring your remarks to a close, please, because you are quite a wee bit over your time. Thank you.

**Clare Adamson:** Oh—my apologies, Deputy Presiding Officer. I thank the people who work in the Wishaw neonatal unit, and I look forward to hearing the minister’s response to the queries that Ms Gallacher and I have raised.

18:09

**Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am happy to speak on this important topic, and I congratulate my colleague, Meghan Gallacher, on bringing the debate to the chamber.

What could be more important to a country than providing the best start in life for all children? I cannot imagine the fear and anxiety that any parent will experience when they find out that their baby will be delivered before the due date and will need specialist neonatal care to help them thrive—or even, unfortunately, to survive. Nonetheless, that is the case for one in seven babies born in the UK.

What that means is that approximately 5,200 babies are admitted to neonatal units in Scotland every year, and that more than 5,000 families are facing the worst circumstances for their newly born baby that they can imagine. They put all their trust and hopes in the skills of the highly trained staff, knowing that they are in no position to provide the levels of care that are needed. Their beautiful new baby is suffering, but there is nothing that they can do about it. The feeling of helplessness must be overwhelming.

I have not had to experience that situation, but I think that we can all empathise with the panic and stress that must arise from it. It is what led to the review of the best start new model of neonatal care, the report of which was published back in 2017, and reaffirmed by the minister in 2023. We might have concerns about the downgrading of some of the neonatal units, but we are halfway through 2025 and so much more still needs to be done, with staffing levels and accommodation for parents still needing intense focus.

I thank Bliss for giving me sight of its briefing for today’s debate. It was really worrying to read of an 88 per cent shortfall in Scotland between the recommended AHPPP—or allied health professionals and psychological and pharmacy professionals—staffing levels in units and the staffing levels that are being achieved. That is 20 per cent worse than the UK average, and I hope that the minister will address that particular issue in her closing remarks.

Another worrying statistic in the briefing concerns accommodation. The briefing highlights that, for every 10 babies needing to stay overnight in a unit, there is only one room for a parent to stay with them. That means that parents are routinely separated overnight from their newborn

during their time in neonatal care. The stress that I mentioned in my opening remarks can be only heightened when distances and lack of family support are factored into the emotional mix. The costs involved will be prohibitive, with accommodation, food and travel costs all having to be met, especially as getting funding for those costs, although welcome, is a cumbersome process. I hope that the minister will take on board the recommendations from the Bliss briefing, not only to address the staffing and residential shortfalls but to provide a much-needed timetable for the implementation of the agreed neonatal model.

In conclusion, I acknowledge the work that has been done, as far as it goes, and as much as we might have concerns about the part of it that goes in the wrong direction of downgrading, I stress the urgency of moving forward at pace with the staffing and accommodation aspects. For every child who deserves to have the best start in neonatal care, we, in this place, should ensure that the correct staffing levels are in place to guarantee that that happens. For every parent who has to deal with emotional stress when they should be rejoicing in the birth of their beautiful child, we, in this place, should minimise the additional stress factors as much as possible. For every family facing this situation, we, in this place, should ensure that there is clarity and commitment for the future. That is the very least that we can do.

18:13

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I thank Meghan Gallacher for bringing the debate to chamber and I commend her for her speech. The Labour amendment is intended not to take anything away from any part of her motion, but to enhance it by talking about the Wishaw neonatal unit, which is an issue that she has addressed herself.

“When you have a child in neonatal intensive care you don’t know what to expect. The family could be called in at any minute to say goodbye. What happens if their child is 200 miles away?”

Those are the words of Lynne McRitchie, whose newborn son, Innes, spent four months in Wishaw’s neonatal unit, fighting off infections and sepsis.

In those first anxious days, Lynne was told that Innes could die at any moment. Innes is now six years old, and Lynne is one of the Wishaw neonatal warriors, raising her voice in concern at the Scottish National Party’s plan to downgrade the neonatal unit that saved her baby’s life. That decision is opposed by everybody, from clinical staff and local communities to the former SNP Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Alex

Neil. It is a thoughtless centralisation of neonatal care that means that the sickest babies could be transferred to Aberdeen, a three-hour journey away, because there is insufficient capacity at Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The SNP Government says that it is following expert advice, so I remind the minister what the “Best Start” report actually said. It stated:

“Three to five neonatal intensive care units should be developed, supported by 10 to 12 local neonatal and special care units.”

Five neonatal intensive care units could easily include NHS Lanarkshire, as Scotland’s third-largest health board. It could easily include the neonatal multidisciplinary team at University hospital Wishaw, which was named the UK neonatal team of 2023. Why, therefore, did the SNP Government interpret the best start recommendation as narrowly as possible, and stop at three specialist units?

The best start proposals offered a vision in which mothers and babies receive

“truly family-centred ... and compassionate ... care”

and noted—as Meghan Gallacher did in her speech—

“The benefits of keeping mothers and babies together”.

I will quote Lynne McRitchie again. She said:

“They talk about keeping families together but parents have not been consulted on these plans.

Mums and babies should not be separated and if there is not enough accommodation at these hospitals then that is what will happen.

Parents would have to stay in hotels. Mums are often discharged before a baby and if there is nowhere for them to stay what will they do?”

The “Best Start” report pledged to redesign services

“using the best available evidence”,

but NHS Lanarkshire was not represented in the options appraisal process, nor did the decision makers use data from the existing neonatal unit in Wishaw. They did not take account of the existing skills and knowledge in Wishaw, nor did they acknowledge the comparatively high number of premature babies being delivered in Lanarkshire.

The evidence for that devastating decision is, therefore, shaky at best, while those to whom it matters most feel left in the dark.

Monica Sheen is another Lanarkshire mum. On multiple occasions, she got the call that every parent dreads: to come to the hospital to say goodbye to her premature son, Alfie. She described the five-minute journey to the hospital as

“the longest of your life”

and said:

“I can’t imagine what a three-hour journey to say goodbye would be like”.

Thankfully, Alfie pulled through, but local people, clinical workers and families are all clear that the facility must be protected for the babies of the future. Will the minister therefore scrap the proposed downgrading of the neonatal intensive care unit at University hospital Wishaw? It is in the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care’s backyard. Will he do anything—anything at all—to protect the interests of vulnerable babies and their parents across Lanarkshire? If not, how will the SNP Government ensure that mums and babies like Monica and Alfie can stay together at the most frightening time in their lives?

18:17

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** I, too, thank my colleague, Meghan Gallacher, for securing parliamentary time to debate such an important topic.

The centralisation of neonatal intensive care is causing massive concern among clinicians. Families have said that it could be catastrophic; there has been strong criticism of the arbitrary scoring mechanism; and it means that new parents to premature and seriously ill babies, at the most vulnerable point in their lives, could—as we have heard today—have to travel miles to visit them, in such difficult circumstances. Tragically, one parent said:

“you don’t know what to expect. The family could be called in at any minute to say goodbye.”

I ask members to imagine having to travel for hours to Aberdeen, Edinburgh or Glasgow to do so.

I pay tribute to campaigners who are fighting to stop the downgrading of existing facilities. The service at Ninewells hospital in Dundee, in my region, is one of those facilities. For more than 50 years, Ninewells has had a first-class AMU—alongside midwifery unit—with neonatal intensive care as part of that offer. The unit was refurbished in 1999. The AMU means that mums have a safety net, and a psychological boost from having access to obstetric labour suites, specialists and equipment almost at their bedside. The Dundee midwifery unit is separate from the obstetric consultant unit, but it is still in the hospital, which allows for easy access to medical support if that is needed.

For years, however, there has been a centralisation of maternity services in Tayside. When the Fyfe Jamieson maternity hospital in Forfar closed in 1993, it was to be replaced by a midwifery service at the new Whitehills health and

community care centre. That did not last long before it closed, and mums were sent to Montrose and Arbroath.

When the Montrose community maternity unit shut in 2016 because of a lack of staff, that was supposedly for three months, but it never reopened. Proposals for a new maternity unit that was planned for two decades were shelved in 2013. The CMU was centralised to Arbroath, and I am told that the standard of care is second to none, but it is based in a building that is more than a century old, and there is little hope of it being replaced.

Why is that relevant to Ninewells? When previous closures have taken place in Angus, it has been with the facility at Ninewells in the background, as a safety net for the most difficult births in the community. As with many of the centralised services in Tayside, specialism has come at the cost of long drives, bus journeys, ambulance trips or plain old inaccessibility for people who do not have a car.

If Ninewells loses its top status for NIC, that could lead to an insane situation in which mums with sick babies living in Dundee will be sent 66 miles away, by the A90, to Aberdeen. As most of us—and most of our constituents, including mums and fathers—know, that would involve navigating the Forfar Road and half of the Kingsway, which is often at a standstill for hours of the day. Surely resourcing NHS Tayside is the best outcome, with a focus on recruitment and retention rather than the erosion of healthcare.

Finally, if even one tragedy can be averted by having a full local NICU, why take the risk?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call the minister, Jenni Minto, to respond to the debate.

18:22

**The Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health (Jenni Minto):** I thank those members who have taken part in the debate. Like other members, I thank Meghan Gallacher for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I note that my door is always open for her to meet me.

Today’s discussion provides me with the opportunity to update Parliament on the progress towards implementing the new model of neonatal care. First, I commend—as other members have—the 15 incredible neonatal units that we have in Scotland, which provide, and will continue to provide, invaluable neonatal care for the babies who require it.

In each of the units that I have visited, I have been hugely impressed by the dedication of staff and the support that they provide for families in those most difficult times. The parents’ stories of

the care and compassion that they have received from staff in all parts of Scotland are truly inspiring.

It is important to set out why the “Best Start” report recommended this change, and why we are moving forward with it. The report, which was based on expert clinical evidence, found that outcomes for the very smallest and sickest babies are best when they are cared for in neonatal intensive care units with high-volume throughput, and where there are co-located specialist services such as neonatal surgery.

To put it simply, the clinical advice is that making this change will improve those tiny babies’ chances of survival. Based on the number of those babies born in Scotland, three neonatal intensive care units would be the optimum model for Scotland. It is important to stress—

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the minister give way?

**Jenni Minto:** I will just come to the end of this section.

It is important to stress that local neonatal units will continue to provide care to babies who need it, including a level of neonatal intensive care. That evidence is widely supported by a range of stakeholders and clinicians—including Bliss, the leading charity for babies who are born premature or sick, which members have mentioned—and now forms the basis of professional guidance that is published by the British Association for Perinatal Medicine, the professional body for neonatology and a specialty group of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.

**Jackie Baillie:** The “Best Start” report recommendation was actually for “Three to five ... units”. Why did you not include Wishaw neonatal unit? You could easily have done that, because NHS Lanarkshire is the third biggest health board. You could have had four units. Why did you not do that? That was the recommendation of experts.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Always through the chair.

**Jenni Minto:** I thank Jackie Baillie for her intervention; I know that she has had conversations with the cabinet secretary in that regard, and he has made it clear that the evidence that we had on the number of babies who require intensive neonatal treatment said that three was the correct number.

In this debate, we are touching on babies who are the sickest and most vulnerable, and who need the most specialist care. Those babies will benefit most from clinicians who know about that care: those who, through the frequency of caring for such babies, have specialised in such care and have an additional layer of familiarity and expertise.

Following the announcement in July 2023, we asked regional chief executives to plan for the national model to be implemented locally, with national monitoring of implementation being co-ordinated by the Scottish Government. We commissioned independent modelling work to fully map the capacity requirements across the system to support planning that was under way, and that report was published in May last year.

Since the announcement of the new model, implementation groups have been established in each region, with representation from each health board, relevant clinical groups, partners and service users. Each group now has in place a regional implementation plan that outlines local work, both planned and under way, to deliver the new model of care. Safety for the babies, families and staff is our utmost priority, which is why we have taken a phased approach to transition, allowing time to build the right levels of capacity in all areas, with NHS boards working towards full implementation by 2026.

**Meghan Gallacher:** I understand what the minister is saying. We are talking about how the implementation is going to be carried out—a lot of boards are involved, and various different people are being appointed to positions to carry it out. However, this is what parents need to know. If the Government continues with the downgrading of neonatal services and parents have to travel up to three hours to get to Aberdeen, if that is where they need to go, will there be a room for them to stay overnight with their babies, so that they can be close by should anything happen? If the answer is no, we should not be going for the downgrade.

Regarding the points that Jackie Baillie raised in relation to three or five units under the best start model, we have, again, to ask the question: why was the award-winning neonatal department at Wishaw general not included in the redesign?

**Jenni Minto:** I thank Meghan Gallacher for her intervention. As I said earlier, my office door is very much open. I would be very happy to have a conversation with you on the matter, because I realise how passionately you feel about it—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, we all need to speak through the chair; that has applied to a number of speakers already. Otherwise, you are referring to me, and I do not think that you necessarily want a conversation with me about the matter. [*Laughter.*]

**Jenni Minto:** My apologies, Deputy Presiding Officer—and I would never refer to you as “you”.

I would be very happy to meet Ms Gallacher, and I will come to the point about accommodation later in my speech.



Over this year, we will carry on working with regional chief executives and NHS boards to continue to implement the service change. Implementation is already under way in the east region, with Fife babies transferring to Edinburgh, and in the west region, with Ayrshire babies transferred to Glasgow. We have established a task and finish group, made up of the regional chief executives, regional planners and lead clinicians, to oversee and support a suite of national actions and co-ordination that will be required for the delivery of each region's implementation plan. That includes further work on modelling the detailed impact on maternity services, and it will inform additional maternity capacity requirements, including for transfers, theatre, ultrasound and interventions.

In order to progress the new model of neonatal care, we must do all that we can to ensure that the infrastructure, workforce and funding is in place to support and sustain the model. We are continuing to provide transitional funding to the boards that are hosting the neonatal intensive care units, as we have done for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NHS Lothian since 2019, totalling £6.5 million, and with additional support for NHS Grampian now being included. That is in addition to the £25 million of support that we have provided to all boards for implementation of the package of recommendations within best start.

The change may mean that a small number of families will have to travel further to be with their baby. The "Best Start" report recommended that

"Neonatal facilities should provide sufficient emergency overnight accommodation on the unit for parents ... with alternative overnight accommodation being made available nearby for parents of less critically ill babies."

Considerable developments have been undertaken to ensure that mother and baby stay together and separation is minimised. All three of our neonatal intensive care units have accommodation available, both in the unit and nearby, to ensure that families can stay with their baby.

In the Bliss report on accommodation for parents of neonatal babies in the UK, the charity notes that it is clear that more needs to be done to accommodate families, and we are considering the Bliss recommendations in relation to the Scottish findings. However, I was pleased that the young patient family fund, which is available only in Scotland, was recognised as providing valuable support to families with the costs of travel, food and accommodation.

In addition, all 15 of our neonatal units are working towards implementation of the Bliss baby charter, providing neonatal units with actions and goals to develop a culture of partnership with parents. I thank all neonatal units—

**Tess White:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Jenni Minto:** I have taken two interventions already, so I would just like to continue.

I thank all neonatal units, which are committed to the Bliss baby charter, and I thank Bliss for championing and supporting on-going improvements in care. The changes that the units are making to provide the best care possible for those babies and their families are extremely commendable.

Our expectations remain clear that all women, at all times, receive high-quality, person-centred maternity care that is tailored to their needs, with quality and safety for mothers and babies central to decision making. I reassure members that, although the decision has been made, we have created opportunities to listen to parents and families as we develop plans for implementation. The Scottish Government, with the support of Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Bliss, has consulted families via an online survey and focus groups.

In closing, I reiterate that I have listened to national clinical experts, to parents of babies in neonatal care and to maternity and neonatal staff across Scotland. I am assured that the move to the new model of neonatal care will deliver the best outcomes for those very smallest and sickest babies.

I thank everyone who has taken time to speak with us. Their experience is, and will continue to be, invaluable as we take forward our work, working collaboratively to plan, deliver and transform services that are critical in delivering the best care for pregnant women, newborn babies, partners and families in Scotland.

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

*Meeting closed at 18:32.*



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