



OFFICIAL REPORT
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Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 18 November 2025

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 18 November 2025

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Professor Fergus McNeill, professor of criminology and social work at the University of Glasgow.

Professor Fergus McNeill (Professor of Criminology and Social Work, University of Glasgow): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I should perhaps explain that it is prisoners week in Scotland, which is why you have a reflection from a criminologist.

Many of us in this chamber have been victims of crime. A few will have sought remedy through the criminal justice system. In those circumstances, we cry out both for justice and for safety. Though nowadays we prefer that term “justice”, the Latin root of the word “revenge” is interesting. It refers to the desire to vindicate the victim, freeing them from hurt, releasing them from vengefulness and settling scores. Paying back is also supposed to liberate the offender from indebtedness.

Seventeen years ago, the Scottish Prisons Commission recommended that the default form of payback in Scotland should be community payback. Rather than relying on the pain of imprisonment to exact retribution, the commission urged us towards more constructive forms of reparation through compensation, service to communities and the hard work of rehabilitation. Yet, despite stable or falling crime rates, the prison population has grown again to record levels and we find ourselves awaiting the recommendations of a new commission.

Why, then, is the prison still our preferred apparatus of punishment? As a criminologist, I know that it cannot be because prison works because, holding other things equal, the evidence shows that imprisonment is more likely to generate reoffending than rehabilitation. In the long term, the bars and the walls do not make those of us on the outside safer and they do not improve the lives or characters of those on the inside.

I think that we persist with imprisonment for two other reasons. First, we have bought into the mythology of the prison as a magic box in which to dump and disappear social problems. Secondly, and more fundamentally, if we are honest, we are just not sure that community payback will satisfy

our thirst for punishment. But here is the rub. Like most of us in this chamber, and most people in Scottish prisons, I have been a victim, I have been a witness and, yes, I have been an offender. I have also worked in criminal justice for 40 years and I have never met a person who was truly liberated by someone else’s suffering. What I have experienced is suffering people freed by connection and belonging and by repaired and reciprocated trust.

Safety and justice happen when we build bridges, not bars, between people. When Jesus was asked to condemn a sinner to suffer being stoned to death, he said:

“Let the one without sin cast the first stone.”

No one dared. Maybe the recognition that we are all sinners should also be the beginning of our investment in bridge building rather than imprisonment.

Business Motions

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-19807, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 18 November 2025—

after

followed by Topical Questions

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Buildings (Heating and Energy Performance) and Heat Networks (Scotland) Bill

followed by Ministerial Statement: Alexander Dennis Ltd

after

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Supporting Scotland's Fishing Industry

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Fife Ethylene Plant, Mossmorran

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.40 pm Decision Time

(b) Thursday 20 November 2025—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motion (if required)

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Climate Action and Energy, and Transport

and insert

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motion (if required)

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Climate Action and Energy, and Transport

followed by Ministerial Statement: Offshore Wind—
[Graeme Dey]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-19808, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on committee meeting times.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament during Members' Business on Tuesday 18 November 2025.—[Graeme Dey]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:05

Fuel Poverty

1. **Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of cold temperatures and the first snowfall, whether it will provide an update regarding the steps it is taking to support any households at risk of fuel poverty. (S6T-02759)

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan): In an energy-rich nation such as Scotland, nobody should be struggling to pay their bills; however, that continues to be the reality for far too many, as successive United Kingdom Governments fail to get a grip on spiralling energy costs. Indeed, the Labour Government came to power promising to reduce average bills by £300, but in just over a year they have risen by nearly £200 more.

We have repeatedly called on the UK Government to introduce a social tariff to address unaffordable bills at source. Our proposals for targeted discounts would see estimated fuel bills reduce by an average of £700 and lift around 135,000 households out of fuel poverty. In the meantime, the Scottish Government continues to use the powers that are available to us to raise incomes and to improve energy efficiency, including by increasing funding for Warmer Homes Scotland, investing around £196 million in our suite of winter heating payments this year and providing a further £1 million to support advice services to help people who are struggling with energy debt. That spending is part of a package of nearly £17 million.

Bob Doris: I thank the cabinet secretary for that update.

I want to concentrate on pensioners. The Scottish Government's pension age winter heating payment will provide vital support to older people in Scotland. The context is that Labour slashed the winter heating support for pensioners last year, which led to the Scottish National Party stepping in to ensure that pensioners in Scotland do not lose out this winter. Although I note Labour's eventual U-turn on the issue, can I have assurances from the cabinet secretary that those matters in Scotland are on track, now that winter is approaching?

Can the cabinet secretary also provide any update on the roll-out of the Scottish Government's winter heating payment? How many older people is it anticipated that that payment will support to heat their homes this winter?

Màiri McAllan: Payments have now commenced and will be made in batches over the coming weeks, with the first pension age winter heating payments having reached bank accounts last week. Through that programme, we are delivering real support to pensioners across Scotland, to the tune of about £157 million, which is helping approximately 880,000 pensioners to stay warm in the coldest months.

It is worth noting that, unlike in the rest of the UK, eligible low-income households across Scotland, including pensioner households, are also guaranteed support through our winter heating payment. We expect those payments to begin in early December.

Bob Doris: I thank the cabinet secretary for the assurance that those payments to pensioners are on track. That support will be more necessary than ever this winter, given that energy bills have spiralled by an average of £200, despite the fact that Labour promised to cut bills by £300. It is scandalous that pensioners in Scotland pay some of the highest bills in Europe, despite having a huge wealth of natural energy resources on their doorsteps.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the possibility of a social tariff for energy. That is absolutely the strategic approach that we need in order to tackle pensioner poverty and fuel poverty more generally. Can the cabinet secretary outline the steps that the Scottish Government has already taken to develop a social tariff that could benefit pensioners who are suffering from fuel poverty? How could that be delivered, either within a UK context or with the fresh start that independence would offer us?

Màiri McAllan: We have consistently and repeatedly called on the UK Government to deliver a social tariff. I am very proud of the work that the Scottish Government has done to develop proposals for a social tariff, which we have done in concert with experts. The tariff would take the form of an automatic and targeted discount on energy bills, to address the chronic issue of the unaffordability of bills at the source.

As Mr Doris pointed out, the UK Government's continued failure to address the issue and recognise the harm that bills and the associated debt are causing households is just another indication that we ought to have control over our own energy resources for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

Scottish Government Core Operating Costs

2. **Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that its core operating costs have

increased by £53 million between 2023-24 and 2024-25. (S6T-02762)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): The Scottish Government recognises the importance of ensuring that funds are aligned to support front-line services. That is at the core of our public service reform programme, which will shift an annualised £1 billion to the front line over the next five years.

The changes to Scottish Government operating costs in 2024-25 were driven by a change in practice—primarily, reducing the use of expensive contingent workers and taking those roles in-house, where appropriate. The financial practice for recording the costs of many contingent workers ordinarily lies outwith the core operating costs. When such roles are moved in-house, that is reflected in what is presented in the accounts. In 2024-25, the number of contingent workers was reduced by more than 200, and the combined reduction across directly employed staff and contractors totalled more than 160. Those reductions in headcount will accelerate as new recruitment controls take effect, and budget controls on Scottish Government operating costs will deliver real-terms reductions in costs.

Craig Hoy: Despite that bluster, it is crystal clear that a £53 million surge in the Scottish National Party Government's operating costs in a single year—which comes at a time when front-line services are struggling and people are paying more in tax—is not a sign that the Government is in control of costs within the Government machine. The response to a freedom of information request that we received over the summer shows that the rise exceeds the Government's forecasts and confirms that the cost of government has almost doubled since 2018. Is that not concrete evidence that the Government has completely lost its grip on spending? How can anyone believe that the SNP Government can run Scotland's finances and reform Scotland's public services when the Minister for Public Finance, who is meant to be bringing down the cost of government, cannot even control the costs of the core Government machine?

Ivan McKee: As I have indicated, total headcount in the Scottish Government continues to reduce. Much of that is down to significant numbers of expensive contractors being replaced with in-house staff, which I am sure Mr Hoy will welcome. The number of in-house staff is also reducing.

Clear targets on headcount and budgets have been set for each of the next five years. There will be real-terms reductions in the Scottish Government's operating costs in each of the next five years, and there will be about a 4 per cent reduction in the Scottish Government's total

headcount in each of those years. That work is being done. We have control of the recruitment and budgeting processes, which are driving the savings that will allow us to redirect £1 billion to the front line.

Craig Hoy: Only in the SNP's la-la world can headcount fall while the salary bill soars. Is not the truth of the matter even worse? Internal documents that were released by Mr McKee's officials confirm that there is no "fully costed plan" to deliver £1 billion in savings, which—let us not forget—includes a 20 per cent reduction in staffing costs. Will the minister confirm whether that means that there will be a 20 per cent reduction in staff numbers over the next four years? Another memo confirms that Mr McKee does

"not expect to be able to provide a full, costed plan",

and another memo insists that ministers

"do not have a specific plan for each pound of savings".

Six months on from that bold £1 billion announcement, does Mr McKee actually have a plan, or is he just playing for time to get this failing Government and its fragile finances through the next election?

Ivan McKee: There absolutely is a plan. Last year, we published the corporate costs, which total £5 billion, 20 per cent of which—Mr Hoy can do the maths—is obviously £1 billion. It is very clear across which public bodies and portfolios the savings will fall, how much of the figure relates to headcount, how much of it relates to estates and how much of it relates to procurement. That is clearly articulated as 20 per cent of the £5 billion. We have published all that data, which Mr Hoy will find online if he cares to look for it.

The headcount targets that have been set for portfolios for next year and each of the years after that are very clear and are dependent on the ratio of front-line staff to back-office staff in each portfolio. The corporate cost reductions are clear, and are rolled out across all the public bodies.

The data is there. The Government and the public sector are working to that data and that is what will deliver headcount reductions of 4 per cent per year. That will be a reduction in total headcount of 20 per cent by the end of the five-year period. That is within the attrition rate that currently applies to the Government.

University of Edinburgh (Redundancies)

3. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that the University of Edinburgh plans to reduce jobs by up to 1,800 as part of £140 million in budget reductions by 2026-27, including what action it will take to protect staff and students from the impact of any such redundancies. (S6T-02757)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education (Ben Macpherson): The university sector across the United Kingdom continues to face financial challenges from a number of factors, including the impact of increases to national insurance contributions and migration policies.

The University of Edinburgh is an autonomous institution, but the Scottish Government expects staff and trade unions to be consulted meaningfully and constructively on the potential impact of any cost-saving measures in line with fair work principles. Ministers cannot compel universities to commit to no compulsory redundancies, but our clear expectation is that they are considered only as a last resort after all other cost-saving measures have been fully explored.

Martin Whitfield: Students at the University of Edinburgh are already seeing the impact of those cuts. Courses are being reduced, support services are being scaled back, and staff do not know whether they will be employed next year. Scotland prides itself on its world-class higher education, but that is not what the students are experiencing.

Staff have overwhelmingly supported on-going action in a re-ballot and, as Jo Grady, the general secretary of the University and College Union, said:

“Before this dispute escalates further, university senior managers need to reflect on where their actions are taking the university and engage urgently and seriously with the union.”

Does the minister agree that, at the very least, the Government’s convening power should be used to bring the parties together to ensure that students are not the ones who pay the price for decisions that have been driven by underfunding and financial instability?

Ben Macpherson: I thank Martin Whitfield for bringing the issue to the chamber and I start by emphasising that my thoughts are with those students and staff who are affected, including constituents who have been in touch with me in recent days.

As the member helpfully and constructively suggested, and as the Parliament would expect, ministers will consider how we can assist meaningfully in this situation, including, potentially, using our convening power, while being mindful of the fact that the University of Edinburgh is an autonomous institution. I had a good meeting with representatives from the UCU on a number of matters recently, and I would be happy to receive further correspondence from it on the matter.

Martin Whitfield: Answers maybe next year, but the questions are being asked this year.

The crisis is not confined to Edinburgh. We now have up to 1,800 jobs at risk there, 600 redundancies proposed at Dundee and 70 at Napier, and a £14 million deficit at the University of the West of Scotland. The Scottish Funding Council reports that nine universities are already in deficit and that that figure will rise to 11 next year. Universities Scotland has said that the latest funding allocation does not give the sector what it needs.

Does the Scottish Government accept that those real-terms cuts to university funding and increasing reliance on volatile international income have helped to create the conditions for mass redundancies and pain across the sector? What is the plan to prevent institutions from sliding further into crisis?

Ben Macpherson: As I stated in my first answer, the university sector across the UK is facing multiple challenges. In Scotland, many of those challenges are external. For example, there is the estimated cost of more than £48 million to Scottish universities because of the increase in national insurance contributions that the UK Government implemented in its budget for this financial year.

We are all waiting to see what the Chancellor of the Exchequer will do in her budget on Wednesday 26 November. The real question for us all, and the question that the university sector will be asking at this moment, is, what will the UK Government do to support those important economic institutions as well as centres of educational excellence?

As for what the Scottish Government is doing in the face of the challenge and in consideration of our budgets—not just in the financial year ahead but thereafter—we continue to engage with the universities sector to ensure long-term sustainability of funding and success for Scottish universities from the very clear starting point that this Government will not reintroduce tuition fees.

We are currently scoping and shaping a framework for the future sustainability of the sector, and we have been engaging with key stakeholders, including sector leaders, staff, student representatives and MSPs across parties, to discuss how they can be involved and to ensure that they have the appropriate input into the various ideas. I will update Parliament on that in due course.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): The minister might have just answered my question. I have been contacted by constituents who have mentioned the issue of tuition fees. Both Labour and the Conservatives have implemented them—and they might be talked about in the future, to

address the pressures. What is the minister's view on tuition fees being used going forward?

Ben Macpherson: There has been some discussion regarding tuition fees in the context of the wider challenge that we all face of the financial sustainability of our excellent universities. If tuition fees were a solution in this scenario, why are institutions in England and Wales facing financial challenges as well? Clearly, tuition fees from undergraduate students would not be a solution to the sustainability challenges.

It would be helpful to have appropriate investment in universities—which are not just educational institutions; they are also massive economic drivers in our economy—by the UK Government in its budget, through revenue and capital, to help to create the economic growth that we all want to see.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The minister will recall that I invited Sir Peter Mathieson here to meet a group of Edinburgh MSPs in the early summer. He suggested that the University of Edinburgh would be out of breach of covenant within three years, irrespective of voluntary or mandatory redundancies. What meetings has the minister had with the principal?

Secondly, given the volatility that Martin Whitfield described in relation to the international student cohort that we depend on, does the minister recognise that his predecessor, Graeme Dey, told the Parliament that the funding system for higher education is fundamentally broken? What plans does the minister have to fix it?

Ben Macpherson: On the latter point, I spoke in a previous answer about the work that is going on to scope and shape the framework for the future sustainability of the sector—work that the Scottish Government is taking forward with Universities Scotland. I would be pleased to have engagement from the Liberal Democrats in that process. As I said, we are seeking to have representatives from MSPs across parties. I will update Parliament on that work in due course, as soon as possible. That work will be important to ensure that, collectively, we embrace the challenge of having a university sector and wider tertiary system that is well positioned to respond over the next 20 years to demographics, the needs of students and the changes in the economy that will occur throughout the next quarter of the century.

Whether at events that I attended last week, when visiting campuses or when engaging with Universities Scotland, over the nearly two months that I have been in this post, I have sought to engage with university principals as much as possible. In my capacity as a constituency MSP, I have had engagement with the principal of the

University of Edinburgh for many years. As is appropriate, I will engage with him going forward.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): That concludes topical questions.

Buildings (Heating and Energy Performance) and Heat Networks (Scotland) Bill

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by Màiri McAllan on the Buildings (Heating and Energy Performance) and Heat Networks (Scotland) Bill. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:24

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan): I begin by emphasising that the Scottish Government is committed to decarbonising heat in buildings by 2045. That commitment was restated fulsomely in “Scotland’s Draft Climate Change Plan 2026-2040”, which was published by my colleague Gillian Martin on 6 November.

The Scottish Government has shown clear leadership in the heat in buildings sector, demonstrated not least by our grant and loan schemes, the legislative requirement for new homes to install clean heat and our continued drive to promote investment and growth in heat networks. Faced with a concerning rise in anti-climate rhetoric, the draft climate change plan maintains that leadership. It confirms our target to decarbonise the heat in Scotland’s buildings by 2045 in a manner that is consistent with our commitment to reduce fuel poverty, and to do so by maintaining our vital support for those who need it most.

It was my intention to build on that work by introducing a heat in buildings bill in this parliamentary session. The Scottish Government has worked at pace to produce a bill ready for introduction. However, it has become clear that proceeding now would not allow the Scottish Parliament to consider the bill in the context of emerging United Kingdom-wide developments. That is particularly the case in respect of the forthcoming UK warm homes plan and on-going work on energy market reform.

I expect the warm homes plan to set out crucial detail on how and to what extent the UK Government plans to rebalance energy prices, particularly the price of electricity relative to gas, in a way that will make clean heating systems more affordable to run. That is a critical part of ensuring that our work to decarbonise homes does not exacerbate fuel poverty—something that I am particularly committed to at a time when more and more people are struggling with spiralling energy costs and resultant debt, and when around 34 per cent of households are living in fuel poverty, which is largely driven by a rise in energy prices.

I am disappointed that the UK’s warm homes plan has been delayed so considerably. As well as continuing to develop the policy content of the bill and consider its associated costs, I have been pressing successive UK ministers in recent months to publish the warm homes plan or, at least, to share with us its content vis-à-vis electricity prices. Regrettably, that has not materialised.

There is no longer time in this parliamentary session to give full consideration to a bill, nor can I ask the Scottish Parliament to consider such an important and complicated bill without a full understanding of the policy context across the UK, which we understand is likely to emerge before the end of the year. Doing so would not be fair to consumers and would risk misalignment and confusion for businesses.

As such, I confirm that the Scottish Government will not introduce a heat in buildings bill during this parliamentary session. Instead, I have today published our draft bill, with a statement of intent to introduce a bill as early as we can in the next parliamentary session, subject to the outcome of the 2026 election. I strongly call on UK ministers to ensure that they bring forward provisions to rebalance the cost of electricity relative to gas, allowing us to pursue vital decarbonisation in a way that we can be sure protects households from fuel poverty.

On the content of the draft bill, members will see that it sets a technology-neutral heat decarbonisation target to replace direct-emission heating systems in all Scottish buildings as far as reasonably practicable by 2045. If ultimately passed, that would put into legislation the target that the Scottish Government is already committed to in policy as part of the climate change plan. The bill will require the Scottish Government to publish a heat decarbonisation strategy every five years and to report regularly on progress, ensuring transparency and accountability and enabling us to update our approach as new technologies develop.

The draft bill includes a regulation-making power to introduce minimum energy performance requirements for buildings that use direct-emission heating systems. The intention is to use that power for the owner-occupied and non-domestic sectors.

The draft bill includes provisions regarding heat networks, including a regulation-making power that may be used to require qualifying buildings in a heat network zone to connect to the heat network or to decarbonise their heating system; a regulation-making power to provide for heat network installation and maintenance licences; and changes to the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021 to streamline its regulatory regime.

The draft bill provisions represent an ambitious, pragmatic and, crucially, flexible advancement in the sector, building on what is already in the climate change plan.

Today's publication of the draft bill offers an opportunity for us to continue undertaking engagement over the remainder of the parliamentary session. That will include launching a targeted consultation in the new year on detailed proposals for heat network installation and maintenance licences to support the implementation of the draft heat network provisions. That will enable the next Scottish Government to move quickly to introduce secondary legislation following the passage of the bill.

The draft bill builds on the huge success that we have made in the heat in buildings sector over the course of this parliamentary session. We have allocated £1.67 billion of funding through our heat in buildings schemes, including a committed spend of more than £840 million for energy efficiency and clean heat projects. Since the start of this parliamentary session, heat in buildings programmes have supported an average of 15,000 households annually, including those in, or at risk of, fuel poverty and, since the launch of the first warmer homes Scotland scheme in 2015, we have invested around £399 million and helped more than 47,000 households across Scotland to live in warmer homes that are more affordable to heat. So far in 2025-26, the average fuel bill saving across all completed applications is approximately £350 per year.

We intend to build on that. I can announce today that we are introducing grant support for home owners to enable connections to heat networks through our long-running home energy Scotland grant and loan scheme, reinforcing our commitment to meeting targets for heat network deployment. That will see grants of up to £9,000, together with loans, to enable households in island and remote areas to connect to local district heat networks and follows engagement by the First Minister during a recent visit to Shetland, demonstrating the responsiveness of our approach and our determination to back investment in heat networks, which we can pursue now and do not need to wait for legislation. Indeed, the Scottish Government has awarded more than £62 million to enable the development of heat network projects in Scotland through our heat network fund and the low-carbon infrastructure transition programme.

We also recently laid new energy performance certificate regulations, which, if approved, will bring an improved EPC rating system into force in autumn 2026, and we have recently completed our consultation on minimum energy efficiency

standards in the private rented sector, helping us to develop regulations that are fair, affordable and achievable.

Further legislation will form a key part of our approach. The issue of heat in buildings affects everyone of us in Scotland and we need to approach the sector in a way that harnesses the opportunities without exacerbating the risks, including the risk of fuel poverty. I believe that the bill that we have drafted finds that balance through a commitment to collective action, taking individuals, communities and businesses with us on a transformative journey, but we need clarity about UK Government action on energy costs.

Today, my officials and I are writing to stakeholders to begin the next phase of partnership work on the policy direction of the bill. Taken together with our draft climate change plan, which sets out our clear commitment to decarbonisation, that marks a real commitment to drive progress on clean heat in an ambitious, yet pragmatic and flexible, manner that can adapt to the technological advances that will undoubtedly emerge in the period to 2045 as well as reflecting Scotland's diverse building stock, with its urban and rural requirements and differing abilities to adapt to change.

Crucially, as I have set out in my reasons today, we will always balance our actions to decarbonise with the imperative of relieving fuel poverty and I again call on UK ministers to take the action necessary so that we can progress.

We will engage widely with the sector and with members from across Parliament, particularly as the UK-wide position becomes clearer. I trust that Parliament will agree with me on the importance of making informed law, from the clearest and most up-to-date position. It is ever thus but is particularly important when the law that we propose to make goes right to the heart of the most important asset that most people will ever have—namely, their home. I trust that Parliament will agree that, for want of just a few months, however frustrating that is, essential clarity on something as fundamental as electricity prices is worth having and that we should consider our position in light of that as we legislate.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary 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. Members who wish to put a question should press their request-to-speak buttons.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement.

We must be serious about the situation that we are facing. This is a really embarrassing day for the Scottish Government. When Gillian Martin told Parliament that she was going back to the drawing board on the heat in buildings bill, she promised that any revised bill would not make Scottish households poorer, yet we have a draft bill that seems to be on the road to nowhere and still demands expensive energy efficiency upgrades from home owners without giving any detail about the standards that they would have to reach.

Given the Scottish Government's track record on the issue, my main concern is that this is yet another attempt by the SNP to impose significant costs on home owners to reach climate targets that are simply not practical. Separately from the bill, the Scottish Government is also pressing ahead with regulations to impose minimum energy efficiency standards on the private rented sector, and that is not to mention the disastrous Housing (Scotland) Act 2025, which will push up costs for landlords and tenants.

Is it not about time that the Scottish Government stopped using the private rented sector as guinea pigs in its botched legislative experiments? Will the cabinet secretary tell us by how much the Scottish Government expects the average home owner will be left out of pocket due to these changes?

Màiri McAllan: I cannot help but feel that Meghan Gallacher might not have read the content of my statement prior to formulating her questions. If she had read it, she would have seen that the reason that I am presenting to Parliament today for taking a pause—however regrettable—is that I want to know what the UK Government intends to do with respect to the cost of electricity, so that we can take forward the work to decarbonise in such a way that we have surety that it will not exacerbate fuel poverty and will be manageable for consumers and households. That is exactly why I brought my statement to Parliament today, so I am a bit perplexed by the tenor of the question.

In respect of the latter point about costs, all of that has to be worked out. I want Parliament to be able to scrutinise and consider costs in the light of the most up-to-date information. That information comes from a UK warm homes plan, on which ministers have, I think, made no less than six representations to successive UK ministers, but clarity has not been forthcoming. However regrettable the pause in bringing forward legislation may be—in the meantime, we have published the draft—it is about giving Government and Parliament the opportunity to make important laws with the full suite of information in front of us.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): In 2021, we had a heat in buildings strategy. In 2023, we

were promised a heat in buildings bill. Experts said that the bill would place impossible financial burdens on households, but the Government carried on consulting and then withdrew it, saying that it would place financial burdens on households. The Government then announced a new and improved bill in the spring of this year. Untroubled by any sense of irony, it seems that, today, it has given us a draft bill while, at the same time, announcing that there will be no bill.

This is beyond farcical. Blaming a Government that has been in office for 18 months while home owners and industry have been waiting for clarity for five years is absolutely absurd. How can this Government say with any credibility that it has shown any leadership in the heat in buildings sector?

Màiri McAllan: “Irony” is an interesting word for Mark Griffin to choose to put to me today, given that the entire reason that I have had to bring the statement to Parliament is because of the complete failure of his colleagues in the British Labour Party and the UK Government to clarify their position in respect of the warm homes plan. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the cabinet secretary.

Màiri McAllan: As I said, Scottish ministers have now pressed UK ministers on no fewer than six occasions since the warm homes plan was first mooted. I have to give UK ministers some due: disruption was caused by the former Deputy Prime Minister having to leave the Government and by ministerial reshuffles having to take place as a result. However, if Mark Griffin thinks that it would be sensible for the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament to proceed with a bill that pertains to the type of energy and the cost of energy throughout Scotland—at a time when 33 to 34 per cent of households are in fuel poverty—when I do not have clarity from the UK Government on what it intends to do on the cost of electricity, I am afraid that that is simply irresponsible.

We have a strong record on delivering on heat in buildings in Scotland. I continue to do that by rolling out further the grants and loans that are available to connect to heat networks, and we will continue to take forward the work on the bill.

The Presiding Officer: I ask all members to resist any temptation to contribute when they have not been called to speak.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): In such a crucial policy area, it is vital that stakeholders in the sector are directly involved in key conversations and plans that are brought forward by the Scottish Government. Can the cabinet secretary provide further information on

what engagement the Government has had and will continue to have with both the energy and housing sectors on the next steps?

Màiri McAllan: I completely agree. It is vital that the transition must be taken forward with communities, not imposed on them. Our consultation on the heat in buildings bill received more than 1,600 responses, and that feedback has helped to develop the content of a significant and complicated bill, the draft proposal for which members have in front of them today.

Since the consultation closed, we have continued to engage widely with stakeholders in the heat in buildings sector. Over the summer, I hosted a series of round tables with consumer groups, energy stakeholders, businesses and others. Last week, I held a round table with representatives of energy consumer organisations, at which we discussed both the need to decarbonise and the fact that it is essential that that is done in a way that people can afford and that does not exacerbate fuel poverty. All of that will continue as we take forward the programme.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Meeting energy efficiency standards can come at great expense for home owners and landlords, particularly in rural areas. In her statement, the cabinet secretary indicated that there will be grants of up to £9,000, together with loans for householders in island and remote rural areas, to connect to local district heat networks. Will she consider certain exemptions for rural properties when meeting those standards would create a significant financial burden for home owners, landlords and tenants?

Màiri McAllan: I am sorry if I have picked up Alexander Stewart incorrectly, but I think that he was referring to exemptions from what would be proposed in the bill. The bill is intentionally drafted to offer flexibility in the type of technology. I note that technology will advance in the years to 2045, and we are conscious that different technologies will suit different housing types across urban and rural Scotland. I therefore trust that, when the bill is taken forward, depending on what happens in the election and what the UK Government does with the cost of electricity, Alexander Stewart will see that flexibility being borne out.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I recognise that the Scottish Government's plans depend on essential clarity on key UK Government actions in reserved policy areas. Will the cabinet secretary expand on what communication, if any, she has received from her UK Government counterparts regarding their consistently delayed warm homes plan, and what impact that will have on progress in the heat in buildings bill in Scotland? *[Interruption.]*

Màiri McAllan: There is a lot of noise coming from members on the Conservative benches. Those members do not seem to appreciate the nature of devolution, in that, when a Government in London is allowed to oversee our nation's energy policy it will have impacts on what a national Government can or cannot do. I have made it clear to UK ministers that clarity on their warm homes plan and on reserved matters such as electricity pricing and market reform is essential for us to have a fully informed debate on those critical matters in Scotland.

Rona Mackay is right to point out that the report has now been delayed several times. There has been an unfortunate amount of speculation, mainly in the press—in fact, I have learned more about the plan in the press than I have in my ministerial engagements with my counterparts. However, ultimately, it is just speculation. What this Parliament needs in order to legislate on behalf of the people of Scotland is clarity—a clarity that we do not have.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The cabinet secretary mentioned that more than a third of our households live in fuel poverty and that one in five is in extreme fuel poverty. What is the Scottish Government going to do now to accelerate investment in making people's homes energy efficient, so that their heat is not wasted? What is the cabinet secretary doing to support every local authority in Scotland to implement their local heat and energy efficiency strategy plans so that our constituents have heat networks that they can link to and can qualify for the grant that was mentioned?

Màiri McAllan: It is worth putting on the record again the difference that our long-standing loan and grant arrangements have made in Scotland. We have allocated £1.6 billion of funding through our heat in buildings schemes during this parliamentary session alone, including a committed spend of £840 million for energy efficiency and clean heat projects, which—I agree with Sarah Boyack—are essential. That has supported an average 15,000 households annually, including those at risk of fuel poverty. As I mentioned in my statement, since the start of the warmer homes Scotland programme, we have helped more than 47,000 households across Scotland to live in homes that are warmer and cheaper to heat.

I also point Sarah Boyack to our work on a social tariff, and I hope that she can advocate for that to her colleagues in UK Labour. We have undertaken very careful work with industry experts to develop a social tariff, and I published the methodology behind it just last week. It is a targeted at-source discount, which we think would reduce the energy bills of around 660,000 people

in Scotland by up to £700 a year, taking about 135,000 people out of fuel poverty. I will be making the case for a social tariff to the United Kingdom Government, and I hope that Sarah Boyack will, too.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The cabinet secretary mentioned electricity prices in her statement. High electricity and gas prices are the greatest driver of fuel poverty, and I am sure that many people across the chamber will share my deep frustration with the UK Labour Government, which pledged to cut energy bills by £300 but, instead, has overseen a rise in energy bills of £200. Can the cabinet secretary advise what impact that has on delivering the Scottish Government's ambitions and say what effect that broken promise from Labour is having on thousands of families across Scotland? Will she join me in calling on the UK Labour Government to take immediate action to bring down electricity prices and put money back in the pockets of those who need it most this winter?

Màiri McAllan: Yes, I agree entirely with Kevin Stewart. I have mentioned a couple of times today the investment that we have made and the number of households that that has helped, but it is also worth putting on the record that, so far in 2025-26, the average fuel bill savings across all the completed applications to our loan and grant scheme are approximately £350 a year. That is helpful, but it will represent a drop in the ocean for the households that have seen their energy bills spiral year after year, while successive UK Governments have utterly failed to get a grip of the situation.

Kevin Stewart is quite right to remind the chamber that the UK Labour Party came to power promising a reduction in energy bills of £300 and that, so far, bills have gone up by nearly £200. Therefore, I urge it to take on the social tariff modelling that we have produced, understand the impact that it could have on taking people out of extreme fuel poverty and fuel poverty, and join me in calling strongly for its adoption across the UK.

The Presiding Officer: I am keen to include all members, so I am grateful for concise questions and responses.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The SNP had already let Scotland down when it first delayed the bill—dropping it entirely from this parliamentary session is more than a disappointment, and stripping the most serious content out of it will please only the new climate-change deniers on the political right. To blame anyone else for that decision, which is entirely of the SNP's making, adds insult to injury. To do all that while mouthing platitudes about climate leadership turns this statement into a sick joke. Does the SNP understand that it will be held

accountable for locking people into dependence on costly and polluting fossil fuel for years to come and for failing to back what should be a thriving clean heat industry in Scotland?

Màiri McAllan: I share Patrick Harvie's determination to rise to the challenge of climate change, and I understand how critical the decarbonisation of buildings is as part of that. However, it is my desire to see this actually work and be feasible in the real world that means that I have to pause the work today. Unfortunately, I can take from Patrick Harvie's contribution only that he is happy to speculate on something as critical as how we heat our homes and what it costs homeowners and renters and for the Government and the Parliament to legislate without full understanding of what the UK Government intends to do about the cost of bills. To me, that is unacceptable.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The cabinet secretary has the nerve to stand here and claim leadership on climate, when she is delaying the very bill that is supposed to be tackling the issue. She boasts that she has taken action on thousands of homes, when, in fact, we have millions of homes in Scotland. Truly, that is a drop in the ocean. When will the cabinet secretary stop blaming everyone else and accept responsibility for this humiliating climb-down?

Màiri McAllan: That is quite unnecessary rhetoric from Willie Rennie—not for the first time. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

Màiri McAllan: What the Government is proposing today is a sensible, reasonable and pragmatic response to the fact that a UK Government—to be fair to it—intends to bring forward a warm homes plan. We understand that the plan will seek to rebalance the cost of electricity relative to gas, which is critical to this work. However, I do not know what is in the plan yet. Despite Scottish ministers repeatedly asking what is in it, we still have no clarity.

As a Government and as a Parliament, we should not be prepared to make laws that affect the people of Scotland when we are not in receipt of information on the full policy landscape. For want of a few more months, I think that the people of Scotland can understand their Government and their Parliament waiting to make sure that we have the full information in front of us before passing laws.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): A new report by the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute reveals that the deployment of zero-carbon networks and energy efficiency upgrades across Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian could

generate up to £2.1 billion in combined environmental and social benefits over the next 25 years. Lothian Heat CIC has now been established as a community interest company to lead that network on a regional basis. It brings together community groups from Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian. It is a visionary infrastructure project to deliver clean, affordable heat across the Lothians by capturing local waste heat and renewable energy and delivering a heat network under a community-led, not-for-profit model. What support can be given to Lothian Heat CIC and other community-led networks to maximise benefits for our communities?

Màiri McAllan: I welcome the ECCI report, which demonstrates the economic importance of heat networks. The Government is very seized of their importance and part 3 of the draft bill is entirely dedicated to that area.

Across Scotland, we estimate that heat networks could account for around 20 per cent of heat demand in the future. Those networks will be a key technology as part of the mix of decarbonisation options that we foresee for Scotland. The member will know that, through our heat networks fund, we are supporting the deployment of heat networks across Scotland. That is not something that has to await primary legislation. Again, I draw Parliament's attention to the extension of our loan and grant scheme for connections to heat networks, particularly in rural areas, which I announced in my statement.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary referred to energy market reforms, spiralling energy costs and fuel poverty in her statement. Does the cabinet secretary agree with me—and not her predecessor—that the floor for the transmission demand residual should be removed in order to lower bills for Scots?

Màiri McAllan: Given the technical nature of Maurice Golden's question, I think that I would be much more able to put the detail to him in writing, as opposed to in the Parliament today.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I recognise that demand for the Scottish Government's heat in building schemes has risen in recent years. Can the cabinet secretary provide more detail on the support packages that are available for households that are looking to move to clean heat? Can she advise members on how much funding the Scottish Government has allocated to those schemes in this parliamentary session thus far?

Màiri McAllan: I have said on a number of occasions that the total amount is about £1.67 billion, but it might be helpful if I expand slightly on how I would suggest that households move to

clean heat or work to improve their energy efficiency.

Home Energy Scotland is an excellent first port of call, offering free and impartial advice on energy efficiency, renewable heating and fuel poverty support in Scotland. Warmer Homes Scotland provides grant-funded installation of measures such as insulation and heating systems for eligible households, which helps to cut bills.

I have mentioned a number of times our grant and loan scheme, which provides grants and interest-free loans to help homeowners to install energy efficiency measures.

I must also mention our area-based schemes and our social housing net zero fund, which help to accelerate energy efficiency and clean heat projects across communities for domestic properties, ensuring the progress at scale that is needed to complement our other schemes.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement. I will allow a moment or two for members on the front benches to reorganise before we move on to the next item of business.

Alexander Dennis Ltd

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

14:55

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): I welcome the opportunity to update Parliament on this topic. My previous statement on Alexander Dennis was made on 17 September, just two days after the First Minister joined hundreds of workers at Larbert as they received the welcome news that the threat of redundancy had been lifted and Alexander Dennis had decided to continue bus manufacturing in Scotland. That landmark occasion was welcomed by members across the chamber and was celebrated in the local communities of Larbert and Falkirk. The preceding few months had been deeply worrying for the workforce, as they faced the loss of up to 400 roles.

As I made clear in September and reiterate today, that positive outcome was by no means guaranteed. In truth, it was hard won and achieved only through the good will, determination and collaboration of a range of partners, including the management and the workers of Alexander Dennis, the trade unions and our enterprise agencies.

The Scottish Government's key contribution was to put in place a truly innovative and exceptional intervention. The First Minister was delighted to announce up to £4.1 million of Scottish Government funding towards a 26-week furlough scheme—the first time that any Scottish Government had supported a company-administered furlough scheme. The furlough grant is restricted to shop-floor workers who are based in Scotland and whose roles are linked directly to bus production.

During the grant period, the company is entitled to recover from the Scottish Government 80 per cent of the basic wage costs of its manufacturing staff, up to a maximum claim of £2,500 per employee per month. Alexander Dennis continues to be responsible for the payment of wages above that threshold and for employer national insurance and pension contributions. Our furlough support is a time-limited, proportionate and targeted intervention that is designed to preserve bus production in Scotland. Had we not acted at pace over the summer, Scotland would have lost for good the capability to build the latest zero-

emission electric buses—the very technology that is required to decarbonise the bus network. We took that bold and innovative step because we believe that Alexander Dennis is synonymous with bus building in Scotland and because the Government is committed to retaining the skills and industrial capacity that are needed to build zero-emission vehicles.

Alongside our duty to support the workers and companies who are producing the technologies that will power the transition to net zero, our policy is to support travel by bus and to encourage investment in a more efficient vehicle that directly emits no greenhouse gases.

Bus travel remains the most frequently used mode of public transport, linking communities, people, businesses and essential services in every part of Scotland. Buses provide an effective alternative to the car in busy city centres and in rural areas, such as my constituency, where rail services are limited.

Around 334 million passenger journeys were made by bus in Scotland in 2023-24—up 13 per cent on the previous year and boosted by the huge success of the under-22s free bus travel scheme. The Government has increased our funding for bus services and concessionary travel from £430 million in 2024-25 to almost £465 million this year. We invest all of that because bus travel offers a more sustainable way to keep our country moving in a way that is accessible to many.

In addition, the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 has now delivered the powers to enable local authorities and regional transport partnerships to take forward partnership working, franchising and local authority-run services, alongside their existing ability to subsidise services. Furthermore, with the passing of the Bus Services Act 2025 earlier this year, the bus sector now has increased certainty on the timing of the journey to net zero.

As Ms Hyslop advised the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee on Friday last week, we continue to support the sector on its journey to net zero by providing £45 million in a third competitive round of the Scottish zero emission bus challenge fund. The scheme will open for applications in early December, with the outcome of the competition to be declared in early spring 2026.

What has happened since furlough was announced? Following dialogue with individual employees and union engagement, Alexander Dennis commenced its furlough scheme on 22 September. In the eight weeks since then—and with the support of the unions—furloughed employees have been offered a range of volunteering opportunities to use their skills and

support their communities until orders pick up again and production restarts.

I want to praise the shop-floor workers of Alexander Dennis. Their resilience and willingness to modernise operational working practices is a testament to their commitment to the future of Alexander Dennis and was a key factor in the company's being able to take a different approach.

I continue to engage with representatives of Unite and GMB—indeed, I have just come from a conversation with both unions—and I remain impressed by their determination to support their members, their desire to find solutions and their openness to change.

The Scottish Government and our agencies also remain in regular direct contact with the business. Last week, the First Minister and I spoke with senior executives of Alexander Dennis and the NFI Group, and Scottish Enterprise continues to offer training and other productivity-enhancing assistance. Research and development and operational support from Scottish Enterprise is helping the company to meet market challenges and make sure that the production sites exit furlough with improved performance.

Members will, no doubt, ask me about the order book for Alexander Dennis. As I said in response to questions following my previous statement, that is a commercially sensitive matter for the company and I will not be able to go into any detail on it. However, I have been assured that the company has been working hard to secure orders in national and international markets, and Alexander Dennis is confident in its ability to secure new work.

I turn now to the role that the United Kingdom Government can play in supporting domestic manufacturing. I am aware that Alexander Dennis is, this week, meeting with UK ministers and will press them for change in UK procurement and subsidy control rules. As nine in every 10 public service buses in the UK operate outside Scotland, we need a long-term pipeline of orders and a supportive UK approach to subsidy and procurement. The future pipeline of demand for zero-emission buses across the UK is essential in supporting bus manufacturing in Scotland. Transport Scotland is working with the UK bus manufacturing expert panel, which is working with UK local and mayoral authorities to develop a demand pipeline for zero-emission buses. That work has enormous potential for Alexander Dennis, but future demand is not yet clearly visible to manufacturers and is not coming to market as quickly as expected.

We have always been clear that the Scottish Government's furlough support scheme is a necessary but temporary measure that provides a platform to secure the highly skilled manufacturing

jobs that we need for Scotland's transition to net zero during the present gap in orders. It is essential that the UK Government is wholly engaged in this matter and does all that it can to support domestic bus manufacturing. I urge the Westminster Government to accelerate progress in this area towards immediate publication of the expert panel's demand pipeline for electric buses.

I have every confidence that the management team and workforce at Alexander Dennis are committed to developing great products and can win the orders that the company needs if it is to thrive.

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. I invite members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank the Deputy First Minister for providing advance sight of her statement. When previously asked about the procurement rules tilting the field against domestic producers, she has pointed to section 17 of the Subsidy Control Act 2022, which prohibits the giving of subsidies that are contingent on

"the use of domestic over imported goods or services".

I also note that, throughout the Deputy First Minister's statement, a recurring theme was pointing the finger of blame at the UK Government, as opposed to the Scottish Government taking responsibility. However, given that the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 mandates the consideration of social value in procurement, surely the Deputy First Minister must realise that the Scottish Government has failed to create frameworks that recognise the social value of Alexander Dennis and other domestic manufacturers, as well as what they contribute and add to our economy.

This question is similar to the one that I put to the minister the last time the issue was raised: does she accept that, without progress on the underlying structural and policy barriers that have left Alexander Dennis—our flagship bus manufacturer—exposed to unfair competition, that situation will keep recurring until the Scottish Government puts measures in place to make sure that we not only bolster our economy but protect the jobs and the skill sets that we need?

Kate Forbes: I take issue with Meghan Gallacher's characterisation of finger pointing. In my statement, I was open about the areas in which the Scottish Government can take action, and the proof of that is that we have taken action. Promises were made by the UK Government, but

we have not seen the progress that we would have liked to see. I read the commentary that is given by businesses, including today in relation to Mossmorran, to see their identification of UK Government policies.

The bottom line is that procurement law is a devolved matter but it is subject to international obligations, which are reserved. In common with the rest of the UK, we cannot legislate to allow for discrimination in favour of domestic bidders at the expense of bidders from countries with which a relevant international trade agreement applies. To be able to amend procurement law to enable preferential treatment for domestic manufacturers would require the UK to make fundamental changes to its international trade obligations.

I was pleased that Meghan Gallacher identified the progress that Scotland has made. Under the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014, Scotland has a sustainable procurement duty that requires authorities to consider

“economic, social, and environmental wellbeing”.

The public procurement strategy for Scotland, which runs from 2023 to 2028, reinforces that requirement, with the aim of embedding community wealth building, fair work and net zero objectives.

When discussing such issues, I have always invited members to deal with the facts. I give total reassurance that we are committed to supporting Scottish industry. If members want any proof, they should look at what we have done with regard to Alexander Dennis.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

I welcome the opportunity to ask questions about this incredibly important topic.

The Deputy First Minister said that she could not provide detail on specific orders. However, given that we are a third of the way through the process and that the furlough scheme is contingent on orders coming forward, will she at least tell us what level of insight the Scottish Government has been provided with? Does she share the firm's confidence that those orders are in train?

Secondly, during the summer, there was correspondence from the Cabinet Office that pointed out that social value criteria can be used in relation to the Subsidy Control Act 2022. Given that a third round of ScotZEB is coming forward, what re-examination of the accommodations in the 2022 act has the Scottish Government undertaken, and what work has it done to redesign the grant scheme to enable more money to go to domestic producers?

Kate Forbes: On our level of insight and confidence, I assure the member that we remain extremely close to the conversations that are

being held with the company. I mentioned the conversation that the First Minister and I had as recently as Thursday evening on these matters. It is extremely helpful for us to understand the level of engagement. I note that the company today issued correspondence to its workforce to continue to provide a level of reassurance. There is also engagement with the unions—I hear directly from them about how the workforce is feeling, a few weeks into furlough.

We are still engaging and having conversations with the UK Government on subsidy control legislation. Changes to the Subsidy Control Act 2022 are not likely to unlock an ability to place bus orders with Alexander Dennis, because buses are typically purchased by bus operating companies, which are not normally subject to public procurement or subsidy control law. Section 17 of the 2022 act prohibits subsidies from being given that are contingent on

“the use of domestic over imported goods or services”.

In our engagement with the UK Government, we are looking at how community benefit criteria can be defined and some of the points that I have shared with Meghan Gallacher.

However, the bottom line is that, on ScotZEB 3, Fiona Hyslop updated the parliamentary committee last week and, considering the level of discussion that we are all having about supporting Scottish industry, I can assure the member that we are doing everything within our powers and within the law to ensure that we support Scottish industry. I am always open to ideas and suggestions from across the chamber, but I can assure the member and others that we have taken a very proactive approach to how we use procurement to support Scottish industry.

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): I am grateful to the Deputy First Minister and the First Minister for their on-going engagement with ADL, which is based in my constituency.

It is important that we address the structural issues that have led us to this situation, which relate to the Subsidy Control Act 2022. I therefore ask the Deputy First Minister to engage with the UK Government on two measures. The first is increasing the social value weighting across public sector procurement, and potentially moving it as high as 30 per cent to support domestic production. The second is ensuring that domestic and international bidders are subject to the requirements of the fair work first policy in an equal way to the way in which ADL invests in its workforce. I believe that those measures would help to create a level playing field for ADL and, importantly, for the workforce at ADL.

Kate Forbes: I appreciate Michael Matheson's questions on that. I am sure that my colleague

Fiona Hyslop, in the work that she is progressing on procurement, will listen carefully to the points that Michael Matheson has made on fair and open competition that is focused on operators of public service routes.

On the two points that Michael Matheson has identified, he will appreciate that we are looking at all opportunities to continue to support the Scottish economy and key industries in it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stephen Kerr, who joins us remotely.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): First, I thank the Deputy First Minister for responding to my request for a statement on ADL. I have to say that I am not content with her line that the UK Government is solely responsible for changes to procurement frameworks. That is also down to the Scottish Government. When did the Deputy First Minister last meet UK ministers? What did she discuss? What expectations does she have of a change to procurement frameworks being made by the UK Government?

In respect of ScotZEB 3, what specific reforms have been made to Scotland's procurement systems since September to give proper weighting to domestic, economic and social benefit and industrial capacity?

Kate Forbes: I engage regularly with the UK Government. If the member wants to know about my diary, I can say that I engaged with a UK Government minister—the Secretary of State for Scotland—as recently as the middle to the end of last week.

On Stephen Kerr's question about changes since September, I laid out clearly in my answer to Meghan Gallacher where some of the restrictions are. We have already made significant reforms to Scotland's procurement systems. We have a sustainable procurement duty that requires authorities to consider many of the issues that the member has identified. That is reinforced in the public procurement strategy for Scotland.

The point is not a matter of my opinion; it is a matter of fact that awards of grant funding are subject to subsidy control law and procurement law, while the devolved matter is subject to international obligations, which are reserved.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Alexander Dennis has an important footprint across the entirety of Falkirk district, and I am grateful for the Scottish Government support. However, the wider supply chain is also at risk. The cabinet secretary correctly calls on the UK Government to accelerate the demand pipeline for electric buses, but can she confirm that there are also positive implications for the wider supply

chain in calling for that action, which makes the need for pace even more important?

Kate Forbes: Michelle Thomson is absolutely right to highlight the impact on the wider supply chain. We have been conscious of that impact throughout, and its supply chain is one reason why we recognise Alexander Dennis as a critically important asset in the Scottish economy and within that area.

With regard to impacts on the supply chain, we have focused our support for Alexander Dennis on how to ensure that it has an appropriate order book. Although there are various initiatives that we can support, such as furlough, the long-term future of the company and the knock-on benefits to the supply chain are contingent on a healthy order book. That remains the focus for the company.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): A number of members have asked about procurement rules. Since 2022, under current procurement rules, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority purchased more than 160 buses from Alexander Dennis, which is more than four times the number that the Scottish Government's ScotZEB scheme has purchased from it. Sixty-seven per cent of ScotZEB 2 orders were sent to Chinese manufacturers.

Could the cabinet secretary clarify—a number of people have tried to get clarification on this matter—how the current round of ScotZEB funding will prevent that from happening again?

Kate Forbes: The Labour Party keeps rerunning that question, despite the fact that we have provided facts in the past and have pursued suggestions that have come to us. For example, the big Labour question used to be why we did not use the Crown Commercial Service framework; the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster also suggested that approach. Unlike Transport for Greater Manchester, Transport Scotland does not own or operate buses, so there is limited rationale for Transport Scotland to procure buses directly.

We will continue to exhaust all the options at our disposal to support ADL.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): The Deputy First Minister mentioned the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. Does she agree that, just as local communities are looking for improved bus services, Alexander Dennis is well placed to benefit from local authorities using the franchising powers that they have under the 2019 act?

Kate Forbes: We want all local transport authorities to be able to improve the bus services in their areas. I have seen huge progress on that in my own part of Scotland. Through legislation, we have given local authorities powers on

partnership working, franchising and running their own bus services. That approach enables local transport authorities to determine what it is best to do to address transport challenges in their local areas. That devolved decision making allows for a much more tailored approach across Scotland.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I welcome the fact that the 26-week furlough scheme has been in place since September and is supporting workers at ADL. However, I am still trying to gauge how deep the Scottish Government's commitment is to ADL. What will happen if, at the end of that 26-week process, the orders have not come? Obviously, I hope that they will, but if not, will the Government be prepared to extend the furlough scheme?

Also, £45 million will be coming out of ScotZEB 3, and we hope that ADL will get some business on the back of that. Will that be announced before the end of the furlough scheme, which could help to give ADL some more certainty?

Kate Forbes: The member will appreciate that I do not want to get into hypotheticals and the what-ifs regarding things that might not go as we hope, because we are working extremely hard to ensure the best outcome for Alexander Dennis. The whole point of implementing a furlough scheme was to give us a bridge, so that we could overcome this gap. We remain very close to ADL.

The member will recall that, when we first announced the furlough scheme, I was clear that Alexander Dennis was responsible for evidencing substantial orders before any grants could be claimed. The whole approach is to ensure that there is an order book.

I will therefore avoid answering the question, but I hope that the member can see from our track record that we absolutely have done everything that we can to support ADL to this point. That should give him confidence that we will continue to do everything that we can to support ADL.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The Deputy First Minister is not able to tell us an awful lot about Alexander Dennis, following on from her previous statement, so I will ask her about the franchising powers in the 2019 act, which Jamie Hepburn referred to. The First Minister will be able to say, quite rightly, to the Deputy First Minister that Stagecoach is a law unto itself in Tayside and Fife, chopping and changing services regularly. We will not get the franchising powers in Scotland until at least 2030. Why is it taking so long to get the powers in place? Work is moving forward in Strathclyde, but Fife is even further behind. Why are we not making progress?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not entirely sure of the direct relevance of that question to the statement. I think that it is a bit

wide, so we will move on to the next question, which, I hope, will relate directly to the matters that were raised in the statement. I hope that Jackie Dunbar will be on point.

Willie Rennie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The Deputy First Minister specifically referenced franchising in her statement and, in fact, Jamie Hepburn also referenced franchising in his question, so I think that my question is particularly appropriate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I heard a lot of talk about Stagecoach and franchising in Tayside and Strathclyde, but I am not entirely sure that those issues are relevant to Alexander Dennis. As I said, I would like to move on to Ms Dunbar's question.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will try my best.

Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the latest Scottish Government engagement with Alexander Dennis employees and trade unions? How has their vital input contributed to getting us to the point that we have reached?

Kate Forbes: Earlier today, I spoke separately to GMB and Unite the Union, and I heard directly from workers on the shop floor. We talked about the general sense of wellbeing among the workforce. The point was made that, six or so weeks into the furlough scheme, it becomes even more important for workers to have other opportunities, which is why we are supporting volunteering opportunities. That will be particularly important if the furlough scheme lasts for the full 26 weeks.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Through ScotZEB 2 funding, 44 buses were purchased from Alexander Dennis, whereas 171 were purchased from Yutong in China. The Deputy First Minister has said that ScotZEB 3 will be different. Will that require a change in the law? If not, is that an admission that ScotZEB 2 got things wrong?

Kate Forbes: I urge Mr Lumsden to look at the letter that Fiona Hyslop sent last week to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. In that letter, which sets out the contents of ScotZEB 3, she stated that the new phase will build directly on ScotZEB 2 and will involve a fair and open competition, with a focus on operators of public service routes. The scheme guidance is being finalised, and ScotZEB 3 will open for applications in early December.

I am sure that Mr Lumsden will appreciate that—in the spirit of moving at pace with those opportunities, as the Parliament is always keen for us to do—if we were to go through an entire

legislative process, we would probably still be talking about the issue this time next year.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): It is vital that we continue to stand up for Scotland's manufacturers, including Alexander Dennis, and to protect skills, jobs and industries. Will the cabinet secretary give us an insight into the challenges that are posed by UK economic policies such as the energy profits levy and, in the case of Alexander Dennis, the Subsidy Control Act 2022? What is the impact of such policies on jobs and economic growth?

Kate Forbes: I take my lead from companies themselves and the reasons that they give for either closures or redundancies. In many cases, we know that policies such as the 2022 act, the energy profits levy and those relating to procurement need to be resolved at source. I am keen to work with the UK Government to do that. We heard a lot of positive sentiment when Alexander Dennis first expressed concern about its future, but, unfortunately, we have not seen a pipeline of manufacturing opportunities or any tangible suggestions for changes to procurement or subsidy control rules that would enable a more proactive approach to supporting domestic industry.

Fishing Industry

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-19739, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on supporting Scotland's fishing industry. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:25

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Today's debate is an opportunity to set out Scotland's approach to this year's fisheries negotiations and the setting of fishing opportunities for the year ahead. It is also a chance to recognise the economic, social and cultural importance of fishing to Scotland, acknowledging the challenges and reaffirming our commitment to supporting our fishing industry.

Despite the current pressures, the fishing industry remains resilient, sustaining many coastal and island communities. In 2024, Scottish vessels landed 561,000 tonnes of sea fish and shellfish worth £756 million—the highest value in tonnage in a decade. We must also recognise the wider seafood supply chain. Our ports, hauliers and many onshore businesses, including processors, supply quality seafood to domestic and export markets, supporting thousands of jobs.

We also know that the sector faces challenges, such as the increasing demands on our seas and the uncertainty that businesses face. It is clear that, for decades, our fishing communities have been let down by successive United Kingdom Governments. The previous UK Conservative Government's Brexit deal fell far short of promised quota increases and it created trade barriers, harming competitiveness and worsening labour shortages. To compound matters, in May, the UK Labour Government landed us with a trade and co-operation agreement that extended fisheries access to 2038.

Although I welcome aspects of the wider deal, such as those that hope to reduce costs and delays for seafood exports, the fact is that the fisheries access agreement falls well short for the fishing industry.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The cabinet secretary is speaking a lot about other parties' policies on fishing. Will she confirm that it is still Scottish National Party policy to rejoin the European Union and the common fisheries policy?

Mairi Gougeon: I am sure that members across the chamber are well aware of my party's and the Government's position, which was set out in a series of published papers. When Scotland

becomes an independent country, we will rejoin the EU, we will be a key player in our marine environment and we will represent our fisheries sector, unlike the other parties.

As I was saying, it should be noted that the agreement was reached between the UK Labour Government and the EU, with no discussion whatsoever with either the Scottish industry or the Scottish Government.

It gets worse. Members who are present today will be aware of the recent UK Government's announcement that it intends to allocate just £28 million of the £360 million fishing and coastal growth fund to Scotland. That is nothing short of an insult to our vital fishing industry and coastal communities. The UK Government must reconsider its approach and enter into discussions with devolved Governments and fishing industry leaders to agree a way forward that treats our industries and communities with the respect that they deserve.

The Scottish fishing sector accounts for more than 60 per cent of the UK's fishing capacity in seafood exports, and more than 75 per cent of all UK quota species are landed by Scottish vessels. To give Scotland a meagre 7.78 per cent of the fishing and coastal growth fund confirms that the UK Government simply does not care about our fishing industry.

On Wednesday 22 October, I wrote to UK ministers to set out our serious concerns with the announced approach. There has been no reply to my letter.

Our position is shared by key Scottish stakeholders, who have written jointly to the UK Government to call for the Scottish seafood industry action group to be reconvened to discuss this urgent issue alongside other concerns. I have written to the UK Government to echo those calls for the action group to be reconvened urgently, but, again, I have received no response. Is it not ironic that a group that was established to deal with the difficulties that the sector faced because of EU exit is once again being called to meet in the light of UK Government choices?

In contrast, this Government will continue to do all that it can, within the powers that we have, to support the fishing industry and coastal communities. We have a strong record of supporting our marine sector through our marine fund Scotland. Since its launch in 2021, the fund has awarded more than £70 million in grants to 390 projects, enabling more than £150 million of investment. We can do much more, but that requires Westminster to listen and act on industry calls for a fair funding settlement.

Our fisheries management strategy is driving innovation and sustainability through measures

such as remote electronic monitoring, vessel tracking and the future catching policy. We are also working towards more sustainable inshore fisheries through our inshore fisheries management improvement programme. We want to develop an agile framework for managing our complex inshore fisheries that is more flexible to the changing needs of the marine environment and our fishers and that can more easily deliver regionally distinct fisheries management measures.

Scottish seafood remains among the best in the world, and strengthening the role that it plays in the global market is a key shared goal for Government and industry alike.

Scotland's fisheries are already heavily regulated, with measures such as quotas, effort controls and technical measures providing a platform for fishing to operate responsibly and sustainably. Scotland's fishers understand better than anyone the importance of safeguarding our seas for future generations. Their dedication, expertise and innovation are pivotal in delivering sustainable fishing in a healthy marine environment, both now and into the future.

I understand the challenges that are facing the fishing industry and the concerns regarding the increasing pressure on marine space, including from offshore wind. The Government has a fundamental role to play in managing the marine space and in ensuring that the interests of all marine users, including our valued fishing sector, are properly considered. Our sectoral planning process for offshore wind seeks to avoid or minimise negative interactions between offshore wind development, the environment and other marine sectors such as fishing. It is vitally important that we continue to take an evidence-based approach and work together across all sectors to manage our marine space effectively, ensuring that the fishing industry can continue to thrive.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Why has the Scottish Government defunded the marine directorate, which limits its ability to do the data collection that is required and prevents it from focusing on future fisheries such as the cockle fishery on the Solway?

Mairi Gougeon: There are a few points there on which I have been engaging with Finlay Carson. He will be aware that there was an increase in the science budget of the marine directorate—if that is what he is referring to—earlier this year.

We have reflected many times on the partnership work that is needed to deliver effective fisheries and marine management. Our collaborative approach has worked well for the

development of fisheries management measures for offshore marine protected areas—MPAs—where we have taken a balanced and pragmatic approach. That collaboration is always important, and never more so than when we are facing difficult challenges and choices. In my time as fisheries minister, I have seen the resilience that the fishing industry has displayed in the face of unprecedented challenges and during recent periods of upheaval and uncertainty. Our industry is facing a very challenging year ahead.

There is no getting away from the challenging advice that applies across the north-east Atlantic. Substantial cuts are proposed by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea—ICES—for a range of species, which, if enacted, will have far-reaching social and economic impacts on our fishermen and processors. I have already expressed those concerns to ministers at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The ICES advice is challenging for a number of our key stocks this year, not least the iconic stocks of cod and mackerel. Many factors might be contributing to that, such as natural mortality, climate impacts and low recruitment across the north-east Atlantic. Our stocks are jointly managed with the fishing nations around us, with total allowable catches agreed annually, varying from year to year based on the science. Change is not unusual, but it is the scale of it that makes it feel different on many levels this year.

Fish stocks are oblivious to lines on maps, and it is crucial that the UK works with its coastal state partners to find joint solutions that ensure the sustainability of both our fish stocks and our catching and processing sectors. Negotiations on 2026 fishing opportunities are already well under way, and I am in regular contact with our negotiators as they work to represent and promote Scottish interests.

I wish to spend a bit of time outlining my objectives for mackerel and cod. North Sea cod is not collapsing, but if we do not proceed with equal attention to biomass recovery and TAC constraints across a number of stocks found in the same fishery, we will be risking the viability of Scottish white-fish vessels. The ICES advice shows a stark picture of the health of the southern sub-stock, and that is primarily what is driving down the levels in the overall advice.

ICES is attempting to manage the whole northern shelf stock based on the depleted state of the southern stock. It is my view that the priority in those negotiations must be the immediate implementation of spatial management measures that restrict potential catches of the southern stock. We already have significant measures in place in Scottish waters, and we will urgently

review them to see what improvements, if any, can be made.

The Scottish Government's economic analysis shows that a 50 per cent reduction in northern shelf cod quota could result in an estimated reduction in landed value to Scottish fishers of between £19 million and £21.5 million. Included in that analysis are 303 Scottish vessels, of which 35 saw northern shelf cod worth an average of 25 per cent of their total landed value per vessel. If historical fishing patterns continue, it is estimated that 40 per cent of those vessels are expected not to make a profit next year.

Northern shelf cod is also an important species for the onshore sector; it makes up more than 5 per cent of the total landed value for Kinlochbervie, Peterhead, Scrabster and Shetland. Advocating for an alternative to the headline advice that should still deliver an improvement in biomass and a sufficient quota for the North Sea and west of Scotland is a sensible and precautionary approach; it is one of our top priorities.

For our pelagic sector and, in particular, the mackerel fishery, my officials are exploring a significant package of measures that, again, focus on delivering a positive impact on stock biomass as well as on real progress towards a more comprehensive sharing agreement between partners, which has, sadly, been lacking and, inevitably, has been a contributing factor to the headline advice. Now is the time to make real progress on mackerel shares and to stop the unilateral actions and subsequent overfishing.

Regardless of any actions that we can successfully deliver, we will still be in unprecedented territory for setting a TAC for 2026 that is well below anything that we have seen on advice sheets since at least 1987. The impact will be felt across the sector, but by none more than our onshore processors. Between 2020 and 2023, mackerel accounted for around one third of the total tonnage and one quarter of the total landed value that was landed into Scotland by the Scottish fleet. In 2023, the four major mackerel processing businesses in Scotland employed more than 300 people in production and operations alone. Many pelagic processing jobs could be at risk and impacts could be felt throughout the sector if appropriate action is not taken. It is for that reason that I am urgently looking at what, if any, other measures I can take as cabinet secretary to support the onshore processing sector.

These are significant challenges for our pelagic and demersal sector, but, with the enormously constructive input from fishing representatives and my committed team of negotiators—

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is concluding.

Mairi Gougeon: We hope to deliver the best outcome possible for Scotland. These are uncertain times for our fishing industry and the wider seafood sector. The negotiations are challenging, but I assure members that we will work collaboratively with international partners to secure the best outcome for Scotland. This SNP Government will continue to stand, as it always has done, with our coastal communities and support a thriving, modern and sustainable fishing industry.

I move,

That the Parliament condemns the UK Government's damaging decision to allocate Scotland only £28 million of the £360 million Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund, which is only 7.78% of the fund; agrees that this is an entirely unfair settlement and calls on the UK Government to reverse this decision, as called for by the Scottish Government and industry stakeholders; acknowledges that Scotland previously received 46% of the EU funding allocated to the UK; welcomes that the Scottish fishing sector accounts for over 60% of the UK's fishing capacity and over 60% of UK seafood exports, and that more than 75% of all UK quota species are landed by Scottish vessels; recognises the need for continued investment to build a thriving, sustainable and modern fishing industry, which is of key importance to Scotland's island and coastal communities and the wider economy; acknowledges the range of challenges facing the fishing industry, including the ongoing negotiations with international partners to agree fishing opportunities for 2026 and the challenging advice for a number of key stocks, and further acknowledges Scotland's negotiating position, which seeks to balance sustainably managed fish stocks alongside a sustainable and prosperous fishing sector.

15:37

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for securing this debate on fishing. I have been asking for such a debate for quite some time; indeed, I issued a press release months ago urging the Parliament to confront head on the challenges for and the future of our fishing industry. I am therefore grateful that, today, we dedicate our time to a sector that is woven into the fabric of who we are as a nation.

Fishing is not merely an industry. Generations have built their lives around the sea, and the sea has shaped the communities that they call home. As we acknowledge that cultural importance, we must also acknowledge the cost. Many members will know families who have lost loved ones at sea—brave men and women taken far too soon. Their sacrifice reminds us that fishing is not a statistic or a policy area; it is a way of life, carried by people whose courage underpins the prosperity of our coastal Scotland.

Despite that, our fishing industry is today under immense economic strain. Scotland has been awarded just £28 million from the UK's new £360 million fishing and coastal growth fund. That is 7.78 per cent of the total, yet we account for almost half the fishing jobs in the UK, and Scotland-registered vessels contribute more than 60 per cent of the value of all UK landings. The arithmetic speaks for itself—that allocation is not just inadequate; it is fundamentally unfair. I welcome the fact that the cabinet secretary has raised that matter in her motion, and we support that part of the motion. I hope that she will support our amendment, which I will come to later in my speech.

At the moment, £28 million to support our coastal communities each year—to renew fleets, back innovation and invest in the next generation of fishermen—does not come close enough. Perhaps Labour colleagues will bring us the good news that Westminster has heard Scotland's call and that it will bring a better and fairer offer.

However, funding is only part of the challenge. Out at sea, another pressure is growing fast—that of spatial squeeze. That is a term that many people outside the industry have never heard, yet its consequences will be felt across Scotland. Spatial squeeze happens when competing maritime uses—wind farms, marine protected areas, and new cables and pipelines—tighten the space in which our fishermen can operate. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has been crystal clear that continued development at the current rate could displace fishing effort to such an extent that the remaining grounds simply cannot absorb the loss.

A joint study by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the SFF outlined scenarios in which the expansion of offshore renewables leads to major reductions in fishing output and substantial job losses, not only on vessels but across entire coastal communities that depend on them.

That is not a theoretical concern: time and again, marine planning decisions proceed without meaningful engagement with those who depend on the sea for their livelihood. Perhaps, in closing, the cabinet secretary could help me understand why there is not fuller discussion with the industry about fair compensation.

I will acknowledge some of the individuals who have helped to shine a light on those issues. They are people who have spent decades advocating for the industry, pushing it forward and ensuring that its stories are heard: Peter Smith of Buckie, an innovator whose adventures aboard the Victory are known in communities across the country; Jim Cowie of Caithness, a merchant, processor, auctioneer, restaurateur and now podcast host

whose passion for Scottish seafood has never dimmed; Jimmy Buchan, who needs no introduction and whose life-long dedication to the sector is felt from the deck of the boat to the halls of Government; and Hans Unkles, whose electric boat, the Lorna Jane, shows what innovation in the fleet can truly look like. There are more who I could name, not least the incredible duo of ex-skipper and industry stalwart Ian Gatt and SFF chief executive Elspeth Macdonald, who I believe are in the gallery today.

Fishermen have highlighted concerns about the relationship between UK and EU vessels in Scottish waters, where rules are not being enforced properly and our own fishermen are losing out because of that. They see the rules being applied lightly to others but heavily to us, along with the consequences of the 12-year deal that allows EU access to UK waters. Many in Scotland's fleet believe that that deal undermined our negotiating position and their economic future. For them, the deal was a moment of deep frustration.

I turn to our white-fish, demersal sector, where we face another crisis—the ICES zero-catch advice for northern shelf cod, which industry leaders have called outrageous. The Shetland Fishermen's Association described it as "fleet-ending madness" and it is right to raise the alarm, because cod, haddock, whiting and other species are caught together in mixed fisheries. We cannot simply legislate cod out of the net and it is impossible to eliminate cod bycatch while still catching other species, which means that a blanket ban is not only unworkable but potentially devastating. We need a smarter, more nuanced, evidence-based approach.

Our pelagic fleet faces its own pressures. Cuts to key quotas, especially for mackerel, are projected to hit hard from 2026 onwards. Those cuts will not only impact the catching sector but will hit processors, hauliers and the many coastal businesses that rely on the fleet's success. I caution the Government that changes to the economic link requirements are not the right answer, which is why it is vital that the fishing industry is properly listened to, not as an observer or a stakeholder but as a primary partner.

I will highlight one positive and forward-looking initiative—the Clyde vision, which is a strategy that provides a comprehensive vision for investment, sustainability and growth in the inshore sector in that region. It deserves to be taken seriously in Government planning, not only as a document but as a road map for real and meaningful development.

When we speak about fishing, we must remember the wider picture, because the industry supports thousands of jobs, contributes millions to

our economy, anchors remote and island communities and plays a critical role in domestic food security. It also contributes to the stewardship of our marine environment, because responsible fishing and healthy seas must go hand-in-hand. We must reaffirm, not only in words but in action, our commitment to protecting livelihoods, safeguarding food security and ensuring that fishermen, not distant bureaucracies or competing commercial pressures, are placed at the centre of decision making.

Finally, I turn to the Moray Firth FLOW-Park. Last week, more than 600 people came to my public meetings in Findhorn and Nairn. Their message was simple: they are not opposed to progress, but they want development done properly, at the right time, in the right place and with genuine consideration for livelihoods and local ecology. Many fishermen in Moray feel misled and overlooked. Some have invested heavily to diversify their businesses, build resilience and create jobs but are being asked to sacrifice everything for projects that appear to be rushed and poorly sited and that lack proper engagement. The proposed location for the Moray Firth FLOW-Park covers several protected areas, sits close to a Ramsar site and lies adjacent to a nature reserve. Those are not minor details; they are significant concerns.

We accept the SNP's wording about fishing, but I ask all parties to stand with us in sending a clear and united message that developments such as the Moray Firth FLOW-Park must not proceed in the wrong place at the wrong time. The message from local people was loud, clear and heartfelt and ignoring it would be an abdication of our responsibility.

Scottish fishing is more than an industry; it is a heritage and a community and is the backbone of our coastal identity. Today, its future is under threat from unfair funding decisions, the spatial squeeze, harsh quota cuts and policies that fail to grasp the realities of life at sea. We must be able to deliver the proper long-term future that fishermen deserve.

I move amendment S6M-19739.2, to insert at end:

“, and opposes the proposed Moray Firth FLOW-Park, which will have a negative impact on the local fishing sector and for which plans have received significant and widespread opposition.”

15:44

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I start by paying tribute to our fishing industry. It is a dangerous industry that delivers us food security and economic value in Scotland.

The Scottish Government is using this debate to complain about the allocation from the fishing and coastal growth fund, but that was devolved at its request. When it made that request, it knew that the only mechanism to devolve funding is through the Barnett formula, which means that it knew the proportion of the fund that would come to Scotland. In the full knowledge of Scotland's larger fishing industry, it should have looked to have a UK-wide fund or spoken to the UK Government and at least tried to negotiate a different mechanism to devolve the funding. Torcuil Crichton, MP for the Western Isles, has asked DEFRA to look at the methodology again, but the Scottish Government should have done that before it asked for the funding to be devolved. It is late in the day for the Scottish Government to make the same request.

Neither is it clear what the Scottish Government will do with the funding. Will it be added to the marine fund Scotland or will it be used differently? The Liberal Democrat amendment to the motion suggests that the Scottish Government should practise what it preaches and provide a greater share of the fishing funding to Shetland. Shetland accounts for 19 per cent of the fish that are landed in Scotland, but it received only 6 per cent of the latest marine fund Scotland awards.

Finlay Carson: I understand how passionate Rhoda Grant is about fishing communities, but does she believe that the reduction from Scotland receiving 46 per cent of the fisheries funding to its receiving a mere 7.78 per cent is fair?

Rhoda Grant: I am certainly not arguing that it is fair. I am arguing that the Scottish Government should have agreed a mechanism for devolving that funding—either that, or it should have agreed UK-wide funding, which would have allowed our fishers to get a fair amount of the funding. The Scottish Government also has money within its budget to increase the funds that it offers our fishing industry.

We also need to look at how we access quota and how we can manage it differently. Currently, fishing boat owners own the licences and the quota. It is theirs, and they can do what they wish with it. They can leave the industry but still control it or they can sell their licences and quota to the highest bidder, regardless of who that is or where they live. Any new quota should be leased in the public interest and not sold to the highest bidder. We should build on the Shetland model, where quota is owned by the community and leased to those who live locally and will land their catch in Shetland. Orkney Islands Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar also do that with prawn quota. That approach gives the councils the ability to manage the fisheries in a way that benefits their local economies.

The UK Fisheries Act 2020 states that quota is a public asset and it requires Scottish ministers to allocate quota using transparent and objective criteria, which should include environmental, social and economic factors. That is not happening, and I am sorry that the cabinet secretary has not used this debate to tell us what steps the Scottish Government is taking to do that.

We are also concerned about the other pressures on the fishing industry. We are all aware of the scandal of ScotWind and how a ceiling was set for bids to develop renewables projects. However, it is also concerning that those sites were auctioned without discussion with the fishing industry. Although the briefings that we received for this debate include diverging views on a number of things, they all agree that there is an urgent need for spatial planning, which is simply not happening.

Tim Eagle: Will the member give way?

Rhoda Grant: I need to make progress.

It is not just about wind turbines. It is also about interconnectors, telecommunication cables and fish farming—and the list goes on. The Conservative amendment alludes to some of the pressures on our marine environment. There must be a plan to ensure that we do not have conflict and tensions between industries, and I look forward to hearing what the cabinet secretary has to tell us about that in her summing up.

The cabinet secretary also spoke about her concerns about fishing opportunities next year, with total allowable catch reductions on the horizon, so I hope that she will address the science on which we base our fishing catches. Again, this year, there are discrepancies between what the industry believes and what the science tells us. That has long been a bone of contention.

When the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee visited the marine laboratory in Aberdeen earlier this year, we were shocked to see the conditions in which our scientists work. The accommodation was dire. Some of the equipment was warehoused in other institutions. Their lecture theatre was a storage room. I was amazed that they were able to work at all.

There are many things that we should be debating and putting in place to ensure that our fishing industry thrives. Sadly, the debate is being used by the Scottish Government to blame someone else and avoid scrutiny of its own mismanagement. Scotland needs a new Government that will work with the industry and put in place structures that allow it to thrive.

I move amendment S6M-19739.3, to leave out from “condemns” to end and insert:

“regrets that the Scottish Government asked for the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund to be devolved without first agreeing a mechanism outside of the Barnett formula that reflected the size and value of the Scottish industry; notes that, since the 2024 election, the Scottish Government has received an additional £5.2 billion of funding compared with previous spending plans; calls on the Scottish Government to plan for the future of fishing, by developing the processing industry to deal with a larger share of fishing in UK waters and encourage new entrants into the industry, especially within the inshore fleet; believes that the Scottish Government must invest in scientific research in order to manage Scotland’s fish stocks to protect the industry going forward; regrets that the Scottish Government has not introduced space-based planning of Scotland’s seas to ensure that renewable developments do not put pressure on the fishing industry and other marine users, and calls for the development of a scheme to lease additional quota share equitably in order to end the trading of quota and licences.”

15:50

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): As a representative of hundreds of coastal communities across the Highlands and Islands, I whole-heartedly share the Scottish Government’s condemnation of the allocation that Scotland has received through the UK fishing and coastal growth fund. The fund is meant to improve technology and equipment, both of which will be essential if we are to make fishing more sustainable and better regulated and provide certainty to fishers so that they can operate with confidence.

The fund is also meant to train the next generation of fishers and support coastal communities—two crucial goals that will stop depopulation and keep communities thriving. It is therefore insulting to my constituents that, despite accounting for almost two thirds of catches and exports, and despite holding roughly 60 per cent of UK waters, Scotland is getting less than 8 per cent of the £360 million funding.

Finlay Carson: Is it correct that, given some of the amendments to the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill that the Green Party has planned to lodge, Scotland will not need 46 per cent of funding, because fishing in Scotland—both inshore and offshore—will be decimated?

Ariane Burgess: I do not think that that is the topic of the debate.

To me, the UK settlement says two things. First, it says that the UK Government would rather support industrial, long-distance fleets operating out of Grimsby, which have superwealthy owners and little regard for the health of fish stocks, instead of smaller operators in towns and villages across Scotland, who brave rough seas in all weathers to make a living and provide the exports that the Brexit-supporting UK Government is so reliant on in its quest for economic growth.

Secondly, it tells us that, again, Scotland is an afterthought for politicians and officials in Westminster. By denying them their fair share of the funding pot, Keir Starmer’s Government is actively betraying Scotland’s coastal and island communities.

Although I hope that the debate will reassure those communities that the Scottish Parliament and the Government have their backs and will secure a rapid U-turn from the UK Government, we are being shown, once again, that the only way in which Scotland can get fair treatment and in which its businesses can operate with confidence—the only way in which it can properly plan for its future—is by becoming the independent nation that it is so capable of being.

Tim Eagle: Will the member give way?

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

Ariane Burgess: I need to make progress.

The Scottish Greens’ amendment to the Scottish Government’s motion seeks to reflect another aspect of fairness that must be addressed—namely, the need for spatial management for fishing, which would relieve the severe pressure on all fishers as well as our marine environment. We need a system that allows us to identify areas in which we should or should not fish that fully adheres to the science and comes with strong local input.

We must also look at how we can better support low-impact fishing, which will die out if we continue to allow trawlers to operate pretty much anywhere they please or if bad actors continue to be able to factor paltry fines into their business plans.

Although I whole-heartedly agree with a lot of what the Scottish Government is saying today, one element of its motion needs clarity, reflection and pause—that is, the reference to the challenging advice on key stocks. We could choose to read the issue in two ways. On the one hand, we could argue that the advice is indeed challenging—cod and mackerel are on the precipice—not just because of overfishing but because of bycatch. The actual level of cod mortality has been estimated by the United Kingdom Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science as being 62 per cent higher than quota limits in recent years.

To allow stocks to regenerate, cod should not be fished unless safeguards are introduced. For example, there should be a higher eligibility bar for quotas to ensure that the stock can recover. This is a challenging situation for fishers who rely on cod, but it is a challenging situation that we find ourselves in because the science has not been enforced strongly enough in regulations.

The second way in which you could read the “challenging advice” line in the motion is more problematic. I think that I heard from the cabinet secretary that it is not intended this way, but those two words could be read as meaning that the advice is challenging because it is frustrating the aims of the fishing industry. I could choose to be cynical, given that the marine directorate has repeatedly shown itself to be more inclined to follow economic concerns than the science. Is this Government science led or not? Being science led is important for the sake of fish and the coastal communities that live off them. Yes, fishers are getting scientific advice that runs counter to their aims, but that advice is crucial if there are going to be any fish to catch in the future. Although I completely sympathise with those in the industry who find the science frustrating, we must look at the issues through a long-term lens and view it as a form of insurance for coastal communities of the future. I ask the cabinet secretary to prioritise the low-impact fleet during the allocation of the fishing and coastal growth fund.

I will turn to the other amendments. I agree with Beatrice Wishart that the Scottish Government must provide guarantees that it will distribute the funding that it has received in a proportionate manner. It is good to see that Rhoda Grant also raised the point about space-based planning and investing in marine science, but I cannot support the Labour amendment where it points the finger at the Scottish Government. Reading between the lines, it appears to suggest that Scottish fishers and coastal communities are being punished because the Scottish Government did not negotiate in the way the UK Government wanted it to. That is not constructive and inclusive leadership.

The amendment in the name of Tim Eagle reflects the unease that I am hearing from constituents about the Moray Firth FLOW-Park, and I sympathise with his amendment. However, I feel that the plans are at such an early stage that we cannot yet say what the impact—

Tim Eagle: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is concluding.

Ariane Burgess: —will be on local fishing.

I move amendment S6M-19739.1, to insert after “economy”:

“further recognises the central role that Scotland’s low-impact fishing fleet plays for those communities, both economically and environmentally, and believes that the fund should prioritise that fleet; accepts that all parts of Scotland’s fleet, not just the low-impact sector, will continue to experience a spatial squeeze without proper spatial management for fisheries, based on science and with strong local input;”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Beatrice Wishart to speak to and move amendment S6M-19739.4.

15:57

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am pleased that the Scottish Government has brought a fishing debate to the chamber. This follows my member’s business debate in February, which was the first fishing debate in Holyrood for some time. There are stakeholders in the public gallery who are listening keenly to the debate; they are very welcome. Their presence underlines the importance and the necessity of regular fisheries debates in the Parliament.

Fishermen have a direct interest in sustainable management of the seas, and the Scottish Government should be doing all that it can to support them and the wider onshore industry. Our fishing fleets face difficult circumstances, and it is vital that the catching and processing sectors work together to ensure that there is a future. Let us not forget what fishermen are doing in often dangerous weather: it is about providing healthy high-protein food.

There are suggestions of a 77 per cent reduction to mackerel catches and a call for a zero total allowable catch for cod, which would see the end of many white-fish vessels. It has also been suggested that the Scottish Government’s economic link licence condition, which requires the pelagic fleet to land 55 per cent of its herring and mackerel quota into Scotland, be increased. That would be devastating for the Scottish pelagic fleet, which is made up of 21 family-owned vessels. Meanwhile, the fleet misses out on potentially better value from landings elsewhere, and, without some of our vessels, the wider supply chain infrastructure and economy will all be impacted.

In my constituency of Shetland, any loss of pelagic vessels would affect the whole economic system and the infrastructure around it. The fish market, the marine engineering companies, the hauliers, the ferriers, and even the grocery stores and butchers that provide food for cruise meals would feel the negative impact of a fleet reduction, and there would be consequences for the white-fish fleet and the 200 or so under-10m vessels.

The Liberal Democrat amendment calls for the proportionate allocation of funding. As the Scottish Government motion sets out, the fishing and coastal growth fund that will come to Scotland is just about 8 per cent of the £360 million fund. Recently, at First Minister’s questions, I highlighted the fact that 9 per cent of the value of fish landed in the UK comes through Shetland ports. In 2024, Shetland was responsible for 88 per cent of Scottish total mussel production, and

shellfish aquaculture is also earmarked for support from the fund.

Let us remember why the fund has become available. It follows the botched Conservative Brexit deal and Labour's disastrous 12-year deal, which the Scottish Fishermen's Federation said was

"an absolutely disastrous outcome for the Scottish fishing fleet."

The UK Government should look again at how it allocates money through the fishing and coastal growth fund. Some of our island and coastal communities are economically fragile, and both Governments should be supporting the whole economic ecosystem, recognising the national contribution of our fishing and seafood sector.

My MP colleague Alistair Carmichael, as chair of the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, was informed last week in a meeting of that committee that there were requests for the fishing and coastal growth fund to be devolved. That has led to the Barnett formula being put into practice, hence the disparity in the percentages coming to Scotland, despite our importance in the overall UK fishing sector. Shetland and Scotland's fishing fleets deserve better backing from the devolved Government, but I also urge the UK Government to look again at a fairer funding package.

This afternoon, Scottish Liberal Democrats will support the Conservative amendment opposing the Moray Firth FLOW-Park due to local concerns and the possible impact on local fishing, and we urge meaningful discussions with local stakeholders about the project.

We will not support the Labour amendment, which rewrites the motion, although we agree with the position that the fishing and coastal growth fund should not have been devolved without first agreeing a mechanism outside of the Barnett formula. We are also calling for a policy that better reflects the size and value of the Scottish industry. The UK Government should have sought a better answer to the situation that we now find ourselves in.

Island and coastal communities will be all too well aware that the Scottish Government in this parliamentary session has not allowed for enough conversation in this place to speak about all that impacts the fishing sector. Indeed, this afternoon's debating time has been cut to accommodate other business. The significance of fishing to Scotland's economy and to coastal communities will be well understood by voters in those areas. A cynic might suggest that the Scottish Government has just remembered that, now that an election is looming.

I move amendment S6M-19739.4, to insert at end:

" , and calls on the Scottish Government to guarantee that its own distribution of the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund, as well as any other similar funding, is allocated proportionately so that the contribution made by Shetland and other island and coastal communities to the fishing industry and Scotland's wider economy is properly recognised."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I advise members that there is no time in hand, Any interventions should therefore be absorbed within a member's agreed speaking time.

16:02

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): My Western Isles constituency can boast a long and proud fishing heritage. If a fishing vessel has an SY or CY registration, she is likely to be one of the smaller, locally owned vessels that form the economic backbone of many communities from Lewis to Vatersay.

It would be fair to say that fishing communities across Scotland have faced challenging times, not least because of the empty promises that were made to them during the Brexit referendum and the lowly position accorded to fishing in the UK's negotiating priorities with Europe before and since then by successive Tory and Labour Governments.

Scottish fishing vessels have seen employment fall by some 15 per cent between 2015 and 2024, and the fishing sector in the Western Isles has experienced a drop in employment of nearly a third, with 274 fishing jobs in 2023-24 compared with 376 in 2019-20. Therefore, when I attended the annual general meeting of the Western Isles Fishermen's Association in Uist recently, it came as little surprise to hear fishers' reaction to the recent news that the UK Government intends to award less than 8 per cent of the UK coastal growth fund to Scottish fishing communities. Indeed, people's views on that subject were made very clear to me by several people at the meeting literally before I got in the door—and little wonder.

The UK Labour Government's decision to give Scotland's fishermen 7.78 per cent of the UK's £360 million coastal growth fund is justified by Labour on the basis that it represents Scotland's so-called Barnett share—that is to say, the figure is reached by looking at Scotland's share of the UK electorate; it is not based on our share of UK fish landings, as previous allocations have been. It is difficult to see—despite some of the arguments on offer from members today—how any UK Government that had thought about it could see any justification for moving away from counting

fish to counting people as the basis for such allocations.

The difference between the two calculations is pretty enormous, given that some 70 per cent by tonnage of the fish landed in the UK in 2023 was landed in Scotland. The Scottish Government had sought funding of £166 million—a 46 per cent share—based on precedent, but that was ignored by the UK in favour of a Barnett-based share that gives Scotland only £28 million. The UK Labour Government's decision has directly cost Scotland's fishing communities, including those in my own constituency, some £138 million—and that is before we open up the question of how much Scotland previously received in EU funding pre-Brexit.

Rhoda Grant: Would it not have been wiser for the Scottish Government to negotiate a formula for devolving that money before it asked for it to be devolved, rather than expressing surprise that it was devolved using the only formula that is available for devolving money?

Alasdair Allan: I thank the member for intervening, because it gives me the opportunity to say this. I am surprised by the argument that Labour makes in its amendment, and I would hope that the Parliament would not attempt to justify cuts by the UK Government on this scale, although I note, with respect, the contortions that the Labour amendment goes through in an attempt to do exactly that.

To pick up on the member's point, Labour's position seems to be that the UK Government has withheld money in that way because the Scottish Government should somehow, using constitutional powers that it does not enjoy, have insisted in advance that it did not do it. I am afraid that that is a pretty feeble argument to put forward, and the fishing communities that are affected will not find it very convincing.

That £138 million has now been lost to projects in Scotland that would seek to modernise our fishing fleet, equip vessels with new technology, train new generations of fishers, boost the seafood sector and support the wider local economy of fishing communities. Those, among other things, are what will be missed.

It takes quite a brass neck to suggest—I think that the Labour amendment takes us down this road—that Scotland should now find that money from its own remaining resources, to make up for what the UK Government has denied us. It takes an even brassier neck—if I can use that phrase—to suggest that the UK Government should then be exonerated from all blame for the situation that has arisen. I hope that the Parliament will see through that argument this evening and act accordingly.

All the evidence tells us that the UK has never viewed Scotland's fishing industry as important—not now, nor at any point since the 1970s, when it described the industry as “expendable”. The £138 million that the UK has now taken from Scotland's fishing communities is but the latest example of that, and we should have no hesitation in calling it out or in standing up for the communities for which, by any reasonable person's reckoning, it must surely be intended.

16:08

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland)

(Con): Scotland's fishing industry is one of the great pillars of our coastal and island communities. It is a sector that provides renewable, climate-smart food; that supports thousands of jobs; that anchors local economies; that prevents rural depopulation; and that is woven into the cultural identity of places all around our coast.

I welcome a debate on fishing, but it should not escape notice that this is the first Government-led debate on fishing in more than two years. Only after repeated calls from the Scottish Conservatives has the Government finally turned its attention to a sector that it claims to champion. If the Scottish Government truly cared about fishing communities, we would not have waited years for a Government-led debate on fishing to come to the chamber.

Let me be clear that we agree with the principles in the SNP motion—of course, Scotland deserves a fair share of UK funding. The Labour Government has shown a complete disregard to that. Of course, we want strong fishing opportunities and a sustainable future for the fleet—nobody disputes that. However, the motion deliberately ignores a very uncomfortable truth: the SNP's record on supporting Scotland's fishermen is one of confusion, contradiction and neglect.

This is the same Government that tried to impose highly protected marine areas—a plan so detached from coastal reality that it was forced to scrap it after an overwhelming backlash. This is the same Government whose officials advised ministers to dismiss concerns about spatial squeeze and told them not to mirror the language of industry, despite the Scottish Fishermen's Federation warning that the sector risks being “crushed” by competing demands on our seas. This is the same Government that, in the latest consultations, is still proposing new restrictions across 19 sites. That is a disgrace. The cabinet secretary cannot stand here today talking about supporting fishing communities while the Government's planning decisions, budget cuts and policy proposals undermine those very same communities.

Perhaps the clearest example of all is the SNP's ambition to rejoin the European Union and, with it, the dreaded common fisheries policy—something that was applauded by SNP back benchers today. After decades of Scottish frustration under the CFP, after regaining control of more than 25 per cent of catching opportunities post-Brexit and after incomes having risen significantly, we now have a First Minister who believes that returning to the CFP would be part of Scotland's national mission. That mission would hammer Scotland's fleet, and Scotland's fishing communities know it.

Let me also address the UK Labour Government's role. The Labour-EU trade agreement, which extended EU access for 12 years, has rightly been described as "a total capitulation" by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. At the same time, as is noted in the SNP motion today, Labour is scrapping ring-fenced funding for fisheries and is allocating Scotland just 7.78 per cent of a £360 million growth fund despite Scotland landing more than half of the UK's catch. That is a disgrace. Rhoda Grant tried to defend that today, but she is trying to defend the indefensible.

Both of Scotland's Governments are failing the sector. Labour is selling out access and short-changing the Scottish fishing sector. The SNP is attacking fishing from the domestic side, wants to take us back into the dreaded CFP and prefers turbines over trawlers. No wonder communities feel squeezed from every direction.

The Scottish Conservatives stand firmly with Scotland's fishing industry. We believe in sustainability and viability. We agree with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation when it calls for space at sea and for its members not to be pushed aside by unplanned, top-down development. That is why our amendment today highlights the proposed Moray Firth FLOW-Park, which local communities and fishermen fear will reduce vital fishing grounds, threaten livelihoods and drive yet more spatial squeeze.

This debate cannot ignore the scale of the spatial squeeze that has been driven by the SNP Government's approach to offshore wind. Since 2022, ministers have approved 32 offshore wind projects, followed by another 12 in 2023 and a further 32 zones identified for future development. That is more than 36GW of capacity.

When our party leader Russell Findlay was in Fraserburgh last week, he warned that Scotland's fishing industry cannot become a

"casualty of green energy obsession".

He is absolutely right. These irresponsible plans risk pushing fishermen out of their traditional grounds and jeopardising the future of our fleets and stocks.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Mr Lumsden often speaks up for the oil and gas sector and for our energy workers. What are his plans for what will happen after the decline in oil and gas? What about a just transition for those workers?

Douglas Lumsden: Our fishermen should not be thrown aside just to promote offshore wind. That is absolutely the wrong thing to do. Rather than bulldoze through historic fishing grounds, the Government should be working with coastal communities to protect fishing as the renewable, climate-smart food source that it is.

The Scottish Government cannot claim to support fishing while allowing developments that directly undermine the sector. Let me put it plainly: we cannot prioritise offshore renewables over our fishing communities. There should be no further consents for offshore wind developments until the impacts on our fishing sector are addressed in full, including through financial compensation for losses, to ensure that the fleet remains viable and profitable. We cannot ignore the voices of the more than 600 people who turned up for the meeting in Findhorn the other night. We need to listen.

Scotland's fishermen deserve more than warm words; they deserve clarity, consistency and real support. Our amendment strengthens the debate by highlighting a key issue of concern for communities across the north-east. Time will tell whether the other parties have the bottle to stand up for our fishing communities.

16:15

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Presiding Officer, if you stand at any of the harbours in my constituency of Banffshire and Buchan Coast before dawn, you will see what this debate is really about: boats landing, crews coming off after a hard shift—as always—and processors getting ready to work, with markets already bustling. My constituency helps to feed the nation and beyond. That is not just an industry that is economically vital, but is also part of who we are along the coast—fishing is the culture, the identity and the daily life of our communities. The sea gives us life but it often takes it away, and I pay tribute to those who have been lost working in our vital industry.

I am shocked at the UK Government's decision to allocate Scotland just £28 million out of the £360 million fishing and coastal growth fund. However, I cannot say that I am surprised. Giving Scotland around 8 per cent of the pot for a fishing industry that accounts for over 60 per cent of the UK's total fishing capacity is exactly the sort of

thing that we have come to expect from any London-based Government.

Scotland is never at the top of the UK Government's list and our fishing industry is never prioritised. Scotland has been handed an 83 per cent cut while England's proportionately smaller fishing industry walks away with over £300 million. Whether it is Keir Starmer or Boris Johnson, it does not matter who is in number 10. The colour of the party in Government changes but the message it sends to my coastal community stays the same: you are expendable. England's industry will always top Scotland's as a priority for Westminster, no matter how much we contribute.

Funding should follow the fish, the fleet and the jobs. It certainly should not be based on a population number that has been scribbled on a spreadsheet that is hundreds of miles away from our harbours. I condemn the UK Government's decision. It is damaging and wholly unfair, and I join the Scottish Government in calling on the UK Government to reverse it.

Tim Eagle: I completely agree with the member on that point; it is absolutely disgraceful what Labour has done. However, the SNP's stated policy is to go back into the common fisheries policy, which would cause even more damage than what Labour is doing. Does she accept that point, which we keep coming back to?

Karen Adam: I was waiting for that comment. We need to stop pointing at bogeymen in the room who are not there. What the Conservatives did to the fishing industry in Scotland was nothing short of an utter and absolute betrayal. To sit there and point the finger— *[Interruption.]* You can shout from your sedentary positions all you want, but you know the damage—sorry, I will speak through the chair. They know the damage that Brexit has done to our fishing industry and, no matter how much finger pointing they do, they cannot get away from it.

Folk in Fraserburgh, Peterhead, Macduff and Buckie know that the work that they do is valued—and it should be. Their work is valued in our Parliament, even if it is not clearly understood or valued in the London Parliament.

It is not just about the boats that do the catching; it is about the processors in our local communities and the factories that keep the local economy moving, turning the catch into world-class seafood. Those processors are often the biggest workplaces in our towns. When this kind of funding is cut, it is those processors, workers and, ultimately, communities that pay the price. That is why the landing obligations and the strengthened economic link rules that were brought in by this Scottish Government are so important. Those policies have already started to shift more Scottish

fish into Scottish ports and Scottish processors. That is what happens when decisions are taken in Scotland with Scottish jobs in mind.

Processors in my constituency tell me that they have the capacity for more. They can invest in new kit and new markets, but they have to be sure that the fish and the workforce will be there. The Scottish Government is doing what it can with its powers, investing through the marine fund Scotland and using the economic link to keep more value here, which I welcome. I thank the cabinet secretary for listening to the fishers and processors and for agreeing to meet with me to discuss the issue further.

We cannot ignore the damage that Brexit has done to the sector or the way that the Conservatives and Labour have treated rural Scotland as a whole. The Tories lined everything up and talked about a sea of opportunity, and Labour has chosen to own that project and carry on. There is a clear pattern. The power, the money and the decision making all sit in London but, regardless of which party is in charge, Westminster has never shown that it is willing to put Scotland's fishing industry or our interests first, and certainly not the interests of rural Scotland.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention?

Karen Adam: If we want stable investment, a fair funding share and an economic system that actually fits our needs, we have to be honest about what is required.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention?

Karen Adam: We can and must fight for the best possible deal within the union, and the motion is part of that fight, but the long-term answer is independence, which would give the ability to design funding that follows our fleet and to negotiate directly for our coastal economy. *[Interruption.]*

Rural Scotland feeds this nation, but Westminster starves it of fair funding and the fair treatment that it deserves. That is why we need Scottish independence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I remind members that they are permitted to ask for interventions, but it is up to the person on their feet whether they give way, and if they do not, that is not an invitation to shout the intervention from a sedentary position.

16:20

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I will start with a quote from my colleague Rhoda Grant, who has said before in the chamber:

"We all know that fish know no boundaries and, because of that, negotiations have always taken place on fisheries."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 2025; c 70-1.]

That is a very good place to start. If we are to help to protect the future of our fishing industry, we must learn to negotiate and, of course, work together. It seems to me that the Parliament wants to support the industry and indeed believes that we need to do so. How we work together will make a great deal of difference. The Government motion recognises the need for

"continued investment to build a thriving, sustainable and modern fishing industry, which is of key importance to Scotland's island and coastal communities and the wider economy".

I think that we all want to work towards that.

Across the UK, we are deeply fortunate to live on a spectacular and unique island that is furnished with an incredible coastline that, for centuries, has provided us with food, employment and leisure. The environmental wealth that is present across Scotland's coast is abundant and, without it, our entire culture would be altogether different. I am immensely thankful for that environment. From speaking to my constituents, I know that it is perhaps the thing that they love and value most about the South Scotland region, and that is why I speak in the debate today.

My constituents love the history of the coastal and fishing industry and the environment within which it functions, and they enjoy the chance to improve their towns and economy that comes with the industry. Of course, I recognise that the industry has had complex difficulties over many years in relation to quotas, funding across the UK, Brexit and other worldwide matters that are often turbulent. I think that we can all agree that the fishing industry deserves stability, and it is by working together that we might get that.

Finlay Carson: I absolutely agree that the Governments should work together. However, where were the UK Government's Scotland Office and Secretary of State for Scotland when it came to identifying a sensible mechanism to set the funding for the budget that the SNP Government motion mentions today? They were absolutely lacking.

Carol Mochan: It is fair to say that we need to think about what happened. My colleague Torcuil Crichton, the MP for the Western Isles, has also spoken to the Labour Government in the UK. Rather than fighting across the chamber, we need to talk about what we can do to move forward.

Mairi Gougeon: Does the member appreciate that the Scottish Government wants discussions to take place but that, because the interministerial groups are the only forums that we have and they have been cancelled or have not met for the past

six months, discussions with the UK Government have become increasingly difficult? That is certainly not for lack of trying on the Scottish Government's part.

Carol Mochan: I appreciate the cabinet secretary's intervention. Of course, I understand how difficult it is to get time with the Government of the day—I am in an Opposition party. We need to keep moving forward and keep talking.

Although the fishing sector in South Scotland is a small part of the overall Scottish industry compared with major hubs such as Peterhead and Fraserburgh in the north-east, it is a vital component of the coastal and rural communities of my region.

My constituents believe that, in order to maintain the environmental wealth that we have in the south of Scotland, we must begin to see the coast as a delicate ecosystem with varied needs and challenges, from erosion to the loss of seagrass to the changes that the fishing industry brings. We need a thriving coastline in order to preserve not just the local environment but the environment of our whole country, and to provide the boost to the economy that coastal and rural communities require. That is a weighty responsibility, so it is important that the chamber takes the time to treat this issue seriously. It also gives us a reason to work together.

I return to the economy. I will not restate the figures that the cabinet secretary provided, but we know that the fishing industry gives us large amounts of landings and of jobs. It is important that we work with that industry to ensure that that continues.

Fisheries employ more than 20,000 people in Scotland. That is important because fisheries are part of our rural and coastal communities, as others have said. We also know that employment in the industry has decreased by 15 per cent. We need to talk about what we can do about that now.

I have only 38 seconds left to speak. I want to talk about what we need to do. I reiterate that we must work together, but in that we must pay attention to some of the things that we can do in Scotland in our devolved capacity. What will make a difference here and now? From what others have said, we know that we need to look at sustainability. We also need to use the science that the Labour amendment mentions. I hope that that can be supported, because without a move towards the use of that science, we might find that we cannot keep the seas sustainable.

During this parliamentary session, we have had a much greater emphasis on this issue, mostly from Opposition members. I reiterate my gratitude for people working together, participating in the debate and, I hope, changing the trajectory.

16:27

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I am delighted to contribute to this important debate about our fishing sector and the fishing industry. It is regrettable that it has taken two years for the Government to bring such a debate forward in its debating time. Perhaps that has happened because the Government does not have much that is positive to say about fishing in Scotland. It has a lot of complaints about other parties and other Parliaments on that subject, but not a lot to say about what it can do in Scotland—or, indeed, what it would do.

One of the telling points in this debate has been the reiteration by the cabinet secretary that SNP policy is to take our fishermen back into the CFP. As though that statement were not bad enough, it was applauded by members on her back benches. I was not surprised to see Humza Yousaf applauding, because he applauds anything—I remember when he was applauding a ferry being launched with painted-on windows. I was slightly more surprised to see the likes of Alasdair Allan, Karen Adam and Emma Harper, who are supposedly representatives of coastal communities, applauding the fact that their party's policy is to take the fishing industry back into the CFP.

Let me ask the representatives from the SNP whether—[*Interruption.*] Oh! I do not know what is going on over there. I have not even asked the question yet, and Emma Harper is throwing her arms up.

I was going to ask whether members of the SNP can tell us what would be positive for their fishermen about rejoining the common fisheries policy. I will give way to Emma Harper if she can tell me that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Emma Harper.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I would like to respond to Douglas Ross, thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I was throwing my arms up in the air because I wondered what he could say that was positive about Brexit.

Douglas Ross: I will try again. It was not a difficult question. I saw that Alasdair Allan wanted to intervene. Will Alasdair Allan tell me what would be positive for his fishermen about rejoining the common fisheries policy?

Alasdair Allan: The member may not quite understand that interventions work on the opposite principle to the one that he thinks they do.

Will the member accept that the reason that some people on this side of the chamber look forward to Scotland being a member state of the European Union is that, for the first time, we would

be represented in Europe by a Government that puts fishing priorities at the top and not at the bottom of our list of negotiating priorities?

Douglas Ross: There is still no answer to my question, so I will give way to Karen Adam. Will she tell us what would be positive for her fishermen about rejoining the common fisheries policy?

Karen Adam: Since my microphone is on, I will come in. I did not press my button to request an intervention but Douglas Ross has demanded that I stand up and speak right now. I think that that is a really inappropriate thing to do. A member cannot just point their finger and ask someone to stand up and jump in on their picky questions. We have already answered the question—I answered it earlier—so I ask Douglas Ross to be a bit more respectful.

Douglas Ross: We are taking part in a debate, which is about an exchange of views. People who are listening to the debate will not have heard a positive reason for rejoining the common fisheries policy from the very party that wants to go to the electorate telling fishermen that that will be its policy. If people vote for the SNP and it ever gets independence, it will take us back into the CFP, but it cannot tell us one single positive about rejoining it. That is very telling.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Douglas Ross: I have already taken three interventions, although I did not get any further with them.

People will question why the SNP maintains its policy of rejoining the CFP if even its MSPs cannot give one positive reason for doing so.

I will focus the rest of my remarks on the Conservative amendment from Tim Eagle, which I welcome. It will send a clear signal that the Parliament opposes the plans for the proposed Moray Firth FLOW-Park. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation is clear that the plans will decimate our local fishing sector. In her speech last month, Elspeth Macdonald said that the site between Findhorn and Burghead will create massive problems for the local fishing fleet, as it is

“positioned directly over established fishing grounds used for decades by inshore vessels that do not have the capacity to fish further afield.”

There was no consultation with the industry on the sites before the agreements were signed. Just last month, a local fisherman who spoke to Lewis McBlane, a reporter from *The Northern Scot*, said that the industry feels “steamrolled” by the lack of consultation on the Moray Firth FLOW-Park. He went on to say that the facility, if it was given the go-ahead, would “decimate” many of the only

fishing grounds on the Moray coast that are suitable for the area's small vessels. He said:

"These are the people whose livelihoods are at risk. They're not against renewable energy, but it surely can't come at the cost of destroying traditional fishing grounds and the way of life that has been there for generations?"

I could not have put it any better myself. The fishermen who have fished those waters for years and want to see their industry continue for years to come are worried about the proposals.

Let us consider who is proposing the Moray Firth FLOW-Park: the Offshore Solutions Group. That group was feared to come to Moray or to listen to people who were invited to Tim Eagle's public meeting in Nairn, because it said that it felt unsafe. I have been to many meetings in Moray. Not all of them have been particularly positive. They have always been robust but respectful. The Offshore Solutions Group did a great disservice to the people of Moray and Nairn by saying that it felt scared to come to listen to the concerns. It should be brave enough and bold enough to come along to hear the huge opposition from local fishermen and local communities.

If the group will not come to Moray and the Highlands to hear that message, it should listen to the message from the Parliament. Tonight, we can unite behind the Conservative amendment and send the strongest possible signal that the Parliament does not support the plans and that we are on the side of the hundreds of people who attended the public meetings, the thousands who have already registered their objections and the local fishermen who are worried about their future. That is why I ask every party to support our amendment.

16:33

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Although the big ports in the north-east and the northern isles might have the biggest landings and the biggest economic impact, I will highlight the contribution and the success of our fishing fleet in the South Scotland region, from Eyemouth to Portpatrick. Those ports might be small compared with those at Lerwick and Peterhead, but we pack a punch.

More than 150 jobs in Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders are directly employed on Scotland-registered vessels. At the last count, nearly 7,000 tonnes of seafood was landed at those ports each year. The catch that lands every day at ports across the south is world leading, high quality and sustainable.

Kirkcudbright is one of the biggest harbours for scallop catch landings on these isles. If people are out for their tea in a seafood restaurant and order the scallops, there is a fair chance that those

scallops will have been caught in inshore waters off the south-west and landed in Kirkcudbright. West Coast Sea Products in Kirkcudbright has expanded from scallop fishing and supply and now sells its catch directly to locals and local businesses in the town and to the Swally n' Scran in Kirkcudbright, which was recently named restaurant of the year at the Dumfries and Galloway Life awards.

The industry is not just about the boats and crew bringing in their catch. It is about the retailers and resellers dealing with outlets far and wide. It is about the food outlets in the south, across Scotland and further afield getting that catch on to plates and dinner tables.

Our offshore shellfish fleet is a crucial part of that mix. It provides skilled, well-paid jobs spread across rural areas and our coastal communities rather than being focused in one or two major ports.

The economic benefit to Scotland of fishing is more than £300 million, but the spin-offs in terms of our image and reputation overseas for high-end food and drinks are incalculable, and the jobs that it brings to fragile rural economies are invaluable. We therefore need to ensure that we are training and supporting future generations to enter the fishing industry.

Colleagues have also mentioned the future workforce. Organisations such as the South of Scotland Sea Fish Training Association, which is run by my constituent Davie Gilchrist, are working hard to ensure not only that the current generation of fisher folk have the skills that are needed at sea, but that the next generation is shown sea survival techniques and how to crew the boats safely and efficiently and deal with emergencies.

That generation should also have fishing as a real option for their careers. I therefore make a plea to careers advisers, Skills Development Scotland and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to agree that we need to make sure that crewing the fleet is on the table as an option for young people who are seeking employment, not just in our coastal communities but across the sector. Keeping the fleet in action in ports such as Kirkcudbright supports jobs in rural communities, boosts our local economies and supports repopulation.

Finlay Carson: I agree 100 per cent with everything that Emma Harper has said up to now, but does she agree that her support for her Government's absolutely disastrous HPMA proposals and the lack of advancement of fisheries such as cockle fishing does the industry in our region a great disservice?

Emma Harper: The Government has not taken forward the HPMA proposals—it listened and decided not to take them forward.

I support the communities and repopulation. Fishing is a fundamental part of our culture and history, and to see it die for lack of new starts would be a tragedy.

It is a slap in the face for all who work in the industry to see the UK Government allocate such a pitiful slice of the fishing and coastal growth fund—less than 8 per cent—given that Scotland’s contribution to the UK’s fishing capacity is greater than 60 per cent. The funding should go to the coastal communities that land catches that contribute so much to our economy and to our global reputation for quality food.

The members across the chamber from me will not thank me for reminding the voters of their role in the fact that the reason why the fund has to exist under UK control at all is because of a Brexit that Scotland voted against but was forced to thole anyway. Thankfully, those in our seafood and fishing sector are made of stern stuff and have adapted—they have had to, to survive and thrive.

The Tories and the Labour members—the former with an amendment that talks about negative impacts on the fishing sector when their actions have hammered what they have called an expendable industry in recent years, and the latter acting as a human shield for the most unpopular UK Prime Minister in polling history—are shedding crocodile tears, and their arguments should not stand when it comes to decision time. Roll on the day when Scotland takes its seat at the EU table as an independent member, gets the fair funding that our fishing industry deserves, shakes off the dead hand of Westminster fiddling the figures, and stands up in Europe for our communities, as compared with the decades of decline that successive UK Governments have allowed to happen on their watch.

Finally, I will address Douglas Ross’s point about the CFP. I would be interested to know who in the previous Governments was negotiating on behalf of Scotland. Scotland has not been at the table. Scotland needs to be in the room, standing up for our own fishing communities, because we know our communities in Scotland. We need to be in the room, at the table, negotiating on our own behalf. I hope that that answers Douglas Ross’s question about the CFP.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. I note that Mr Lumsden, who participated in the debate, is not here. I expect an explanation for that, as well as an apology.

16:39

Beatrice Wishart: I think we can agree that this has been an interesting and, at times, lively debate, which demonstrates how complex and valued the fishing sector is.

In speaking to my motion for a members’ business debate that I led earlier this year, I highlighted many issues, including climate change, warmer seas and stocks moving to new areas, as well as

“marine pollution; ghost gear; and the impact of dumping at sea on fish, seabirds, cetaceans and other marine life.”—*[Official Report, 18 February 2025; c 95.]*

There is also the matter of food security, which is increasingly important in the unstable world in which we live. There is increasing demand for marine space, which is causing spatial squeeze. As other members have said, there are issues around at-sea renewable energy infrastructure, which is pushing fishing out of traditional grounds. Further concerns involve marine protection, the dangerous actions of other fishing vessels at sea, the impact of policy making without up-to-date scientific evidence and data, and the trade and co-operation agreement negotiations.

I have long raised concerns about the level of Scottish Government investment in its marine directorate. As Finlay Carson and Rhoda Grant highlighted, what we saw during the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee’s visit to the directorate’s premises in Aberdeen shocked us. I believe that the directorate is inadequately resourced for all that is being asked of it. Fisheries protection, marine protection, scientific research and data gathering are all matters for future policy making.

Fishermen are custodians of our seas, and the last thing they want to see is biodiversity loss or low stock numbers of fish species that can never recover. Their way of life is dependent on accurate scientific data, and the Scottish Government needs to ensure that we get that right. If we do not—I note the huge concerns about the proposed cuts in the pelagic and cod quotas—the impact on island and coastal communities will be devastating. Members should be in no doubt that there will be serious consequences. If there are no vessels at sea catching fish, there will be no need for a processing sector onshore, and the impact on all those communities will be felt throughout the wider supply chain, which relies on the fishing boats, many of which are family businesses.

I note Scottish Environment LINK’s call for the decentralisation of fisheries and conservation management to allow for more inclusive and locally appropriate decision making. Shetland’s location would lend itself to local, rather than regional, management to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Indeed, Shetland is already ahead on

local management, in that the Shetland Islands Regulated Fishery (Scotland) Order 2012, run by the Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation, has been working well for nearly 25 years, and it should be held up as an exemplar.

The Shetland Fishermen's Association has highlighted the impact of delays in confirmation to Seafish of the marine fund Scotland award for fisheries training. The optimum time for attracting school leavers and getting new entrants is June, and any delay in the confirmation of funding means that that critical timeframe is lost. That has happened for the second year in a row and, as the cabinet secretary knows from my correspondence with her, it is important that bureaucracy should not get in the way of, or be detrimental to, bringing new entrants into the industry. I welcome Emma Harper's comments about fishing as a career and all that can be done with skills development. Without the proper investment in the next generation of fishermen, we cannot guarantee a sustainable fishing sector for the future. As I have pointed out, that could be disastrous for communities around Scotland.

In the past few years, the Scottish Government has thrown highly protected marine areas at the fishing community. HPMA's appear to be an existential crisis for the sector as we know it. There have been revelations that the First Minister was told not to engage with the very real issue of spatial squeeze in our seas. There has also been the economic link policy, as well as delays in providing a training scheme that will help to develop the future of the sector. There has even been the loss of annual debates in the Scottish Parliament.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention again the disastrous Conservative Brexit deal for the fishing sector and the UK Labour Party's damaging extension of that deal until 2038.

Finally finally, I will give a plug to two businesses in my constituency that have won awards recently. Island Fish Shetland has been celebrating an award for delivering quality from sea to plate, and Frankie's fish and chip shop has won another award. I feel that I could not speak about fishing without mentioning those businesses.

Douglas Lumsden: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise to you and to members for not being in the chamber at the start of the closing speeches.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Lumsden. I call Ariane Burgess.

16:45

Ariane Burgess: In today's debate, many good points have been made, and it has been extremely lively and tense at times. I hope that the communities and fishers who are watching today's proceedings will take some reassurance from the knowledge that we are doing all that we can, from different perspectives, to put pressure on the UK Government to change course.

Turning to members' contributions, I appreciate Alasdair Allan's points about the loss of millions of pounds via the settlement that would have supported fishing for the future across Scotland, and especially in the Western Isles.

Karen Adam and Rhoda Grant both paid tribute to fishers, who work in an extraordinarily challenging environment; again, it is important to have funding to put in place the infrastructure that is needed to support them in their work.

Emma Harper talked about the need for funding to support our future fisheries and get new entrants into the sector.

I agree with Carol Mochan's point that the fishing sector absolutely needs certainty for the future.

Emma Harper: I would like to hear Ariane Burgess's thoughts on the fact that the average age of a fisher is 56, which is why I mentioned the need for investment in training.

Ariane Burgess: I thank Emma Harper for that point. Having met a skipper of a Shetland vessel in his 50s who told me that he does not know who will take the vessel on after he retires, I find that very concerning.

The UK Government's decision to underfund Scotland's fisheries is a shocking example of how our fishers are being exploited and mistreated by Westminster. However, we must acknowledge that the situation is not playing out in a vacuum. Getting the funding that Scotland is due is an important element if we are to have a sustainable marine future. Equally important to that aim is having a regulatory system in place that protects stocks and supports a diverse fleet that forms the backbone of Scottish coastal communities for the long term.

The key point that I want to get across today is that fishing is inseparable from the marine environment. Without solid foundations for healthy ecosystems above and below the waves, fisheries and those who rely on them cannot thrive. Unfortunately, at present, we do not have a solid foundation. We have a marine planning system that does not properly deal with fishing. Scientific research is being underfunded or even sidelined by economic interests. Quota is being gifted to a small number of very large operators, some of

which land their catch abroad. With such a system in place, is it any wonder that cod, which is one of our most iconic species, is on the brink? Should we be surprised that the number of vessels has fallen by 16 per cent since 2015, with jobs disappearing as a result?

To reverse stock declines and restore jobs, we need to have a better way of doing things. The United Nations sustainable development goal 14—on life below water—sets the vision for sustainable fishing. That means having a marine directorate that is guided by science and that manages our seas with the long-term health of fish stocks and communities in mind. It means having clearly defined spaces so that we can have zones for habitat regeneration, others for low-impact fishing and places where bottom-towed gear can be used. It means allocating quota in a transparent way that adheres to the criteria and includes environmental, social and economic factors. It means subsidising those who operate responsibly and coming down hard on those who seek to exploit our seas no matter the cost.

By having a long-term vision that everyone can align with, we can put wild-caught fish on a sustainable pathway for the future and create healthy and thriving communities. Sustainable seas create sustainable populations, which means that we can address the blight of depopulation that is hurting coastal communities across the Highlands and Islands. To really get those communities thriving, we must give them an active stake in the governance of inshore areas. That way, the needs of all marine users can be met, and fishers, marine tourism businesses and other recreational users can be at sea in harmony.

One potential way of turning that vision into a reality is by exploring the inshore fisheries and conservation authority model that is used in England, which brings different stakeholders together and gives them the power to set byelaws in their regions. Although that model is by no means perfect, I believe that it is a great starting point because it decentralises the system, which can only aid transparency. It also supports greater collaboration between groups that are often pitted against one another.

All of that is especially crucial when we consider that Scotland will be at the forefront of the climate crisis. As I pointed out to the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, scientists are becoming extremely agitated about the fact that the gulf stream is increasingly likely to collapse during this century. That vital ocean current passes right through the abundant seas off our west coast. If we are to be prepared for such an event, mitigate the impact on coastal communities and be in a position to adapt, we must start

ensuring that our seas are as healthy as they can be.

In wrapping up, I call on the Scottish Government to commit to a system that respects the science; that sets out distinct fishing zones that will enable both marine ecosystems and communities to thrive; that supports fishers, particularly those who use low-impact methods; that fairly distributes quota; and that puts community decision making at the heart of inshore regulation. If we can achieve that, as I believe we can, we can ensure that we have thriving seas and communities up and down Scotland's coast.

16:51

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Unusually, I have not prepared a speech, because I have been asked to close for Labour this evening and wanted to listen to the debate and to speak to the points that have been raised.

On that note, it is important to begin with the reason for today's debate. The Scottish Government lodged a motion supporting Scotland's fishing industry, but that motion seems to focus solely on the allocation that has been made from the fishing and coastal growth fund—one that is disproportionate to the size and value of Scotland's fishing industry. I understand why the Scottish Government chose that issue for its debate today, but it is surprising that, after many years of what used to be an annual debate, fishing is only now being debated, and seemingly in response to that issue. That is a real issue and it is right that we debate it, but I would have expected it to be the Scottish Government's priority to use Scottish Parliament time to discuss and debate issues for which a minister has responsibility.

During the debate, we heard from Beatrice Wishart that February this year was the first time in quite a while that the issue of the fishing industry was given debate time in the Scottish Parliament. The Conservative Party used its business time a few weeks ago to deal with the issue, which Tim Eagle pointed out again today. I reiterate the point that has been made by a number of parties, which is that we need parliamentary time for fisheries debates. I hope that the Scottish Government will provide debate time for the issues that are not included in its motion but for which it is responsible, so that we can hear more.

The cabinet secretary's opening speech included a lot of detail and was very dense. I will have to go back and read the *Official Report* to get all the detail, but I do not think that I heard any specific commitment by the Scottish Government to support the processing sector, and I do not know what it intends to do about marine spatial

planning. Those crucial issues warrant debate time.

Beatrice Wishart pointed out that the fishing and coastal growth fund should not have been devolved without prior agreement to proportionate calculation. My colleagues Rhoda Grant and Carol Mochan noted that the issue of the disproportionate nature of that fund is being raised by Labour MPs. I also heard the cabinet secretary say that she is raising the issue directly with the UK Government and I heard her frustrations about the interministerial group.

It is regrettable that so much Scottish Parliament debate time is being spent discussing intergovernmental relations.

Finlay Carson: Will the member give way?

Mercedes Villalba: I will in a moment.

I think that any fishers who are watching the debate want to hear about the practical measures that our parties and Governments will take to support them, so that situation is a shame.

Mairi Gougeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Mercedes Villalba: I will take Mr Carson's intervention first.

Finlay Carson: The member appears to suggest that it serves Scotland right that it asked for the fishing fund to be devolved and it got what it deserved. She suggests that the Scottish Government did not realise that it would be completely unfair. Even Rhoda Grant suggests that it is unfair. Surely the UK Government's Scotland Office should have realised that it would be totally unfair.

Mercedes Villalba: I do not think that anyone is saying what Mr Carson has just said. The point is that, when a fund is devolved, there are procedures in place for that to happen, and it would not be right for the Scotland Office to intervene in intergovernmental negotiations. I see Mr Carson shaking his head. There is definitely a way forward, but I do not think that it serves any of our communities for us to point the finger at one another. I have said, and members on the Labour benches have recognised, that the fund has been allocated in a disproportionate way. What I have not heard is any contrition or any acknowledgement that the Scottish Government has let our communities down by not having the foresight that was needed. It is very easy to criticise in hindsight a decision that has been made, but our communities have the right to expect the Scottish Government to have its head in the game.

I hope that we will hear from the cabinet secretary in her closing speech how we can work

together, given the unanimous support across the Parliament for the fishing industry. I do not think that we will get unanimous results on the motion or amendments, but that does not mean that we cannot continue to discuss the subject and work together outside this debate. However, that starts with respect for one another during debates. Just today—like every other member, I think—I received a revised and updated code of conduct from the Presiding Officer. This afternoon, I was disappointed to see one member use his speech to make personal attacks on members of other parties and to goad members. I do not think that that serves either our constituents or the issue at hand.

I know that the cabinet secretary wanted to intervene, but I am sorry that I have run out of time. I will conclude there.

16:57

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries)

(Con): I want to speak not only about figures and funding allocations, but about the people behind Scotland's fishing industry, a healthy selection of whom we welcome to the gallery today. This has never been a debate that should divide us politically. Traditionally, it has united us, because at its heart are the men and women who go to sea, risking their lives in one of the most dangerous working environments on earth. They face unprecedented seas, brutal weather and the constant reality that one mistake could cost them everything.

Fishing is not simply about numbers on a balance sheet; it is about fathers, mothers, sons and daughters who leave home knowing that safety is never guaranteed. They do that not for themselves alone, but to put food on our tables and to sustain the communities that depend on them. When we talk about fairness and support, we must remember that every fisherman who goes to sea deserves to come home safe every single time. Along with that, we must tackle the mounting pressures that threaten the very future of their livelihoods.

I turn to the motion. The UK Labour Government, which we already know does not understand farming, given its hated family farm tax, has now clearly shown that it does not understand fishing, with the decision to allocate Scotland just £28 million from a £360 million fishing and coastal growth fund—a mere 7.8 per cent. We heard about that from Alasdair Allan and, indeed, from members of all parties except Labour. Scotland accounts for more than 60 per cent of landings, 63 per cent of UK waters and the majority of seafood exports, but that allocation ignores all those realities. Not only is that unfair—even Rhoda Grant believes that it is unfair—it is

damaging, because it undermines confidence in investment and the resilience of our coastal communities.

Under the previous arrangements, Scotland received 46 per cent of the fishing funding. That was proportionate and fair. The current settlement is neither.

Rhoda Grant: I am sure that Finlay Carson understands the Barnett formula and how funds are devolved to Scotland. Would he and his party not have ensured that the formula was right before asking for the funds to be devolved? A UK-wide fund would have meant that Scottish fishers would have had an equal chance at getting funding. Instead, the Scottish Government wanted the funds devolved before it knew the mechanism by which they would be devolved.

Finlay Carson: I would have thought that the Labour minister for Scotland would have ensured that Scotland got a fair deal; however, that is sadly lacking.

Funding is just part of the story. Our fishing industry is under pressure from every direction. There is spatial squeeze, as raised by Tim Eagle and others, from offshore wind developments and marine conservation zones that are often imposed without proper consultation or compensation. There is no doubt that the SNP puts “turbines over trawlers”, in the words of Douglas Lumsden. Spatial squeeze is the likely result of the policy from Ariane Burgess and her extreme Green Party Bute house agreement on HPMAAs, bringing in arbitrary limits on fishing without any scientific basis. The Green plan would mean fish for the rich, not fish for all. There is market uncertainty, rising fuel costs, regulatory complexity and unjustified delays in Scottish Government marine planning policy. It is a bit like developing agricultural policy: delay makes it harder for businesses to plan and invest.

I agree with Beatrice Wishart that uncertainty and doubt around stock assessments are the direct result of the SNP Government’s decade-long underfunding of science, under which the once-leading organisation that was Marine Scotland and is now the marine directorate has declined beyond recognition. There is a lack of trust and a lack of direction. Science needs to be, and should be, behind every demand for tough decisions; at the moment, it is not.

We have had disastrous international negotiations, as raised by Tim Eagle, which, too often, have left Scotland short-changed on quota opportunities. Labour’s so-called reset with Europe is another Labour disaster. Instead of restoring leverage through annual negotiations after 2026, Labour has locked Scotland into a 12-year extension of EU access to our waters until 2038.

That means no further quota gains, no flexibility and no ability to rebalance opportunities in favour of our fleet. The Labour Government treats fishing as a bargaining chip in wider trade and security talks. Scotland’s interests are sacrificed. That is yet another Labour sell-out, and it will have a lasting consequence for our coastal communities, just as if we were forced back into the CFP. Despite Douglas Ross’s efforts, we heard from the SNP not one good reason to go back in.

Those pressures are real, and they are compounded by a narrative that is too often peddled by the likes of the Green Party, which paints fishermen as environmental villains. That is wrong. Scotland’s fishermen are not the problem but a part of the solution. They are eager to embrace sustainability, to invest in low-impact gear and to support science-led management. However, they need Government to work with them, not against them. The Scottish Fishermen’s Federation has been clear: we need certainty, stability and space to operate. That means securing the best possible fishing opportunities through annual negotiations and international agreements, a moratorium on further offshore wind consent until the impacts on fishing are fully assessed and compensated, and investment in science and research, because our seas are changing and decisions must be based on robust data and a practical, workable catching policy that supports sustainability without strangling the sector.

Let us be clear: food security matters. Polling shows that 86 per cent of the public agrees that food production from Scotland’s seas is as important as energy production. Fishing delivers renewable, healthy protein, with far lower emissions than most other forms of food production. Fishing is part of Scotland’s greener future, but only if we get the policy framework right.

The industry is not standing still. It is modern, efficient and globally recognised. It wants to transition to a more sustainable practice. It wants to invest in low-impact gear. It wants to work with Governments to protect marine habitats. However, that transition requires support, not punitive measures; funding, not token gestures; compensation when appropriate, as Tim Eagle mentioned; and trust, not constant suspicion.

On the proposed Moray Firth FLOW-Park, I will be crystal clear: that development poses a serious threat to local communities and the fishing industry. We cannot allow renewable energy ambition to come at the expense of renewable food production. Scotland needs both, and that balance must be struck. I therefore urge everyone across parties to send a united message: stand up for Scotland’s fishermen, demand a fair share of

funding, commit to policies that protect jobs and communities, and maintain our ability to harvest healthy, sustainable seafood for generations to come.

Fishing is part of Scotland's identity—past, present and future. It is about fairness and vision—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr Carson.

Finlay Carson: It is vital that the industry survives. It has done so for centuries and it can continue to do so if we give it the support that it needs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mairi Gougeon to wind up the debate.

17:04

Mairi Gougeon: Thank you. As ever, there is a lot to cover, and I will try to get through as many of the issues that have been raised as possible. I thank members across the chamber for their speeches and interventions, because the range of views that has been expressed reflects the importance of Scotland's fishing industry, not only to our economy but to our coastal communities and way of life. Ultimately, the debate reminds us that fisheries negotiations are not just about quotas and numbers; they are about livelihoods, food, sustainability and Scotland's role as a responsible steward of our marine resources.

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

As ever, we have covered a wide range of topics, which speaks to the complexity and diversity of our fishing industry and the wider marine sector but also to the sheer impact of the industry on constituencies across Scotland. I heard really passionate contributions from Beatrice Wishart, Karen Adam, Alasdair Allan and others, and I will speak about some of the contributions and reflect on the amendments to the motion.

First, I agree with much of what Tim Eagle said and much of what Finlay Carson said in his interventions. I emphasise the importance of our sector, and I am glad that there is overall agreement with the sentiment of the motion and what we have tried to put forward today in seeking a fairer funding settlement for Scotland and for our fisheries and coastal communities in particular.

Tim Eagle's amendment highlights the proposed Moray Firth FLOW-Park, which is a really important matter in his region. First and foremost, I absolutely acknowledge the public concerns that have been raised about the proposals. No applications or assessments in relation to the construction of the project have yet been submitted to Scottish ministers, but any specific proposal that could be taken forward would be subject to the relevant required regulatory processes, which would include a formal public consultation.

The marine directorate licensing division is considering the regulatory requirements for activities involved in the storage and construction of turbines in the sea, and it will provide clarity and guidance to all interested parties as soon as possible. However, I emphasise that, as I understand it, these are the very early stages of the project. My officials are having regular meetings with the fishing industry and Crown Estate Scotland, and I will be closely monitoring progress on the matter.

Tim Eagle: I thank the cabinet secretary for that. This is difficult, is it not? If we comment early, people will say that we are too early; if we comment later—once an application has been submitted—we will be too late, because there is a live application. Therefore, will the cabinet secretary join me and my colleagues in sending the clear message that the proposed location is the wrong location? Maybe there is a right location out there for these proposals, but the one that is proposed is absolutely the wrong one. That is the message that we are trying to get across today from the 600 people who were at my public meeting.

Mairi Gougeon: Again, I completely appreciate the concerns that Tim Eagle and his colleagues have raised today. My concern is that I do not want to prejudice any procedures or processes that would take place as a result of the proposal—

Douglas Ross: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Mairi Gougeon: No, I will not take any more interventions—thank you.

I turn to Rhoda Grant. I normally have a lot of sympathy with and agree with what she says, but, unfortunately, I do not today, as I find myself in complete and utter disbelief at some of the statements that have been made by Labour. The Scottish Government has had long-standing devolved responsibility for fisheries. While we were members of the EU, Scotland received 46 per cent of the UK's EU fisheries funding, reflecting the size and importance of our industry. Since Brexit, the fisheries funding allocation to the Scottish Government has taken into account the

size of Scotland's industry. Therefore, it is simply not accurate to say that that funding must be devolved via the Barnett formula.

In our engagement with the UK Government, ahead of its announcement on the fishing and coastal growth fund, we made clear on numerous occasions our expectations that we would maintain an arrangement outside the Barnett formula that recognised the relative size and importance of fishing industries across the UK and that Scotland should receive at least 46 per cent of that fund.

UK ministers have ignored repeated requests to allocate fisheries funding using a fair and appropriate distribution method that adequately reflects the relative scale of the fishing industry in Scotland. As part of the recent spending review, the Treasury took the decision to baseline the existing fisheries funding arrangement with the devolved Administrations, meaning that we only receive Barnett consequential on any subsequent changes to funding. The decision to move away from an approach that was based on the size and importance of the industry and to move to the Barnett formula was taken by the UK Government. That was separate to our engagement on the fund.

The UK Government has not provided an adequate rationale for that change to the funding model; the approach that the UK Government has taken is also not in the spirit of the fisheries framework memorandum of understanding, which states that

"fisheries policy authorities will work together on the division and allocation of subsidies and grants in the UK".

The decision on the fishing and coastal growth fund allocation has been done to us and not with us.

Rhoda Grant also talked about negotiations. Negotiations involve discussions—discussions between two parties, or potentially more—but it is hard for any negotiations to take place when the other party simply does not come to the table and simply does not respond.

Our only forum of engagement has not met for about six months and that is not for lack of trying on the Scottish Government's part. I appreciate that Carol Mochan took an intervention on this point, but, in response to her suggestion that it is just generally hard to get in touch and to get time with the UK Government, I would say that, quite frankly, it should not be. It just shows the complete lack of respect and the complete disregard that the UK Government has for our country generally, let alone for the Scottish Government.

There are other contributions that I want to touch on; I have a lot to get through. On Beatrice Wishart's amendment, I absolutely understand the

importance of fishing—economically, socially and culturally—to the Shetland Islands. Our analysis shows that, of the applications that have been submitted to the marine fund Scotland to date from projects or individuals based in Shetland, about 70 per cent were awarded grant funding.

My fisheries officials were in Shetland a couple of weeks ago and heard first hand from the fishing community some of the concerns that have been expressed by Beatrice Wishart in the chamber today and I know that officials are continuing to discuss certain aspects of the fund with local fishing representatives.

It is also important to recognise that significant amounts of the marine funding that we distribute are awarded to projects that benefit the whole of Scotland. For example, £2.7 million has been awarded to the independent observers programme, which provides data on fish stocks, and £8.4 million is being used to support Seafood Scotland's UK and export market programme.

Ariane Burgess raised a number of critical points, which I hope to touch on. One point was in relation to spatial planning, which is mentioned in her amendment. As members across the chamber might be aware, the Government has been working on national marine plan 2. The clear expectation is for the plan to be used to implement the Government's priorities for the use of space, to support the growth of the marine economy and the protection of the marine environment, and to help to reduce conflict that arises from the competition for space.

We are currently exploring how the draft plan could respond to some of the issues that were raised in the consultation on the planning position statement that we published, including requests from some stakeholders for marine spatial planning and the potential implications for existing users. I expect to receive advice from officials on that soon, and potentially on the feasibility of having marine spatial planning in the draft national marine plan. That advice will also set out options for taking forward a spatial approach. Of course, we would be in the next parliamentary session before any of the content of the draft plan would be considered.

The Tories have been going in really hard on the point of independence this afternoon, as if this Government's position is a secret that we have been holding. It is so secret that we published a paper on it called, "Our marine sector in an independent Scotland". They might all like to read it. I actually cannot put it better than Emma Harper did: as an independent country, we will be in the room and have a seat at the table, because one thing is for sure—we cannot trust any UK Government to act on our behalf.

Scotland's seafood is world class and our fishers understand better than anyone the need to safeguard our seas for future generations. This Government will continue to work in partnership with the industry to navigate current challenges, seize the opportunities and deliver a thriving, sustainable and modern fishing sector.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): That concludes the debate on supporting Scotland's fishing industry.

Karen Adam: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Earlier in the debate, Mr Douglas Ross shouted across the chamber at me, pointed at me and demanded that I stand up to answer him. I want to place on record that I found that behaviour unacceptable and disrespectful, and that I do not answer to Mr Ross—I answer to my constituents.

Although I do not find Mr Ross intimidating in the least, it might have been a very different scenario for another female MSP. Young women will be watching the debate in the chamber in Parliament and thinking that that is accepted here. I hope that anyone with aspirations to be a parliamentarian who is watching at home will not be put off, and will be assured that we stand against that type of behaviour. This is a workplace, and the Parliament should be a safe and respectful environment for women and for all members.

Presiding Officer, I ask whether such conduct is in line with the standards of behaviour that you expect, and whether you will remind members that robust debate does not justify shouting at, and physically gesturing towards, colleagues in that way. Thank you.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Adam. I have just assumed the chair and I am unaware of the circumstances. Ordinarily, a member's contribution is not a matter for the chair, and debate can be robust and passionate, but members at all times have a duty to conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner that enables everyone to contribute. Whether to make or take interventions is a matter for the member, too.

As I was saying, that concludes the debate on supporting Scotland's fishing industry, and we will move on to the next item of business.

Mossmorran Fife Ethylene Plant

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a statement by the Deputy First Minister on the Fife ethylene plant at Mossmorran. The Deputy First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

17:16

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): Members will be aware that ExxonMobil, the owner and operator of the Fife ethylene plant, has today confirmed its decision to close the plant from February 2026. I am extremely disappointed by that news, which will be a devastating blow for the highly skilled individuals who make up the workforce there, for their families and for the local communities, as well as for the contractors and supply chain companies whose employment relies on the site. The loss of such high-value jobs is a very significant blow to Scotland's economy.

ExxonMobil informed me on Monday 17 November—yesterday—that the decision followed a formal marketing exercise to seek a buyer for the plant, but no viable offer had been received. I was first made aware by the business on 11 November that it was actively marketing the site; I understand that discussions with the United Kingdom Government have been under way since April 2025.

The business has cited that the regrettable decision has been taken on the basis of prolonged negative market conditions for ethylene; an ageing plant; a dwindling supply of ethane from the North Sea; and the UK Government's policy regime on energy prices and carbon taxes.

ExxonMobil will now commence a period of consultation with its workforce, and I expect to receive regular updates on progress from the business. Members will understand that we have been aware of the situation for a very limited amount of time, but I wish to provide the workforce with my assurance that we will work with them and their representatives to explore all options to support them. I can confirm that we have enacted our PACE—partnership action for continuing employment—initiative.

I have made it clear to the business that it has a duty to its workers, and I expect it to actively explore all options to identify new roles across the business for those who are affected by the asset's closure.

I also recognise that there are vast numbers of people in the wider community and supply chain who rely on the Fife ethylene plant for their

employment. To that end, I will engage constructively with Fife Council, businesses and other stakeholders, including MSPs, to consider all possible actions to mitigate any impact on the local economy.

I also intend to convene a task force, which will include a range of stakeholders, to urgently consider any actions that the Scottish Government, with our limited economic powers, could take to mitigate the impact of the decision. I will keep the Parliament updated on the work of that task force.

The Scottish Government wants to secure a long-term and sustainable future for Mossmorran. However, and perhaps more pertinently today, any hope of Mossmorran remaining a source of highly paid roles in the manufacturing sector relies on phasing in, at pace, alternative projects.

Members will be aware that the Scottish Government has already provided material support to bring forward such projects at Grangemouth. It is my intention to expand the Grangemouth investment task force to include Mossmorran as a potential location for projects that have been identified through the Scottish Enterprise endeavour.

We will work with our partners, including the UK Government, to expand the eligibility of projects—identified through the investment task force—that could also locate at Mossmorran, with the hope of securing high-value jobs and investment.

In the coming weeks and months it will be critical for all stakeholders to play their part. I call on all those with a vested interest, across this chamber and beyond—and, in particular, the UK Government—to work with me to secure a future for the site that aligns with our ambitions.

In its announcement today, ExxonMobil has been clear that the UK's current economic and policy environment does not create a competitive future for the site.

It is clear that the levers for an industrial intervention, as we have seen in other UK nations, such as England—at Scunthorpe—and Wales, lie with the UK Government. I believe that it is crucial for UK ministers to consider what more they can do for the workers at the plant and to take urgent, overdue action to address the high cost of energy, which is slowly crippling industry, in order to support the sector and the livelihoods of those who depend on it.

I will conclude by calling on ExxonMobil to ensure that it handles the next phase of this process with care and respect for its workforce and the wider economy and that it is conscious of its responsibilities as an operator.

Once again, I place on the record not just my concern for the workforce but my assurance that the Scottish Government will do all that we can to mitigate the impact of this decision on those who are affected.

The 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. I would be grateful if members who wish to put a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement and for advance sight of it. She is entirely correct to reference the body blow that the closure is, not just to the workforce directly employed at Mossmorran but to the wider supply chain across Fife and Scotland as a whole, with a threat to 400 high-value, highly skilled jobs. It comes on the back of the closure of Grangemouth refinery, which had a similar impact.

Our industrial capacity in Scotland is being hollowed out, and the cabinet secretary cannot put all the blame for that on the UK Government. From both Governments, we have seen an environment that is hostile to the oil and gas sector, and the pursuit of a high-tax, low-growth agenda that is damaging both the economy and the business environment. Rather than just putting the blame on the UK Government, as the cabinet secretary was doing in her statement, can she tell us what action the Scottish Government will take—for example, in its forthcoming budget—to create an economic environment in Scotland that will support industries such as this and avoid future, similar closures?

Kate Forbes: I agree with Murdo Fraser's comment on the impact on staff and I recognise the impact on the wider supply chain. We have secured agreement with the company to ensure that we have all the evidence and data that we need for a thorough economic analysis of what the impact will be.

The Conservative Party is always quite quick to defend the Labour-run UK Government when there are such challenges. I prefer to look at the details that the company has given for why it has made the decision that it has. It is our understanding that ExxonMobil has been in prolonged dialogue with the UK Government regarding the future of the site. The business has been clear with me that it recognises, as I have explicitly asked it to do, that the Scottish Government does not have the policy or fiscal levers to make a material difference to the economic fundamentals of the decision. The business has also been clear that the UK Government's approach to carbon taxation and

energy prices has had a fundamental bearing on the decision—members can read its comments. The UK Government must seriously reflect on the fact that its choices are having a fundamental impact on the livelihoods of people who live in Scotland. In order to respond well, we must understand what the root causes are, and I have just outlined them.

On the action that the Scottish Government will take, I was clear in my statement about our determination to convene a task force to phase in some of the work that we have been doing with Grangemouth, to identify some of the projects that have the most potential and to consider whether there is a future for them at Mossmorran. It is early days, but that work illustrates this Government's determination to ensure that we protect the local community from the worst economic impacts of the decision.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I agree with the Deputy First Minister's opening remark that the decision is devastating news for the workers and the wider community that will be impacted by it in Fife. However, the decision must be viewed in the wider context of the global challenges to ExxonMobil's revenues and the global restructuring decisions that it is making, including the recent closure of its chemicals plant in France. I understand that UK ministers have actively been trying to engage with the company for many months. However, the only proposals that came forward would have left the taxpayer on the hook for millions of pounds without any route to profitability.

I will ask the Deputy First Minister the following questions. First, she made no mention of trade unions. I understand that Unite and GMB have significant memberships on site. What dialogue has she had with trade unions about the workforce and any redeployment and retraining possibilities?

Secondly, the site is 40 years old but had a lifespan of only 20 years. What discussions have taken place over recent years, not just recent weeks, about the long-term viability of the site, given that it is 20 years beyond its designed use?

Finally, this situation is not isolated. We are 26 years on from peak oil and the chemicals industry is dependent on the oil and gas sector. What plans does the Scottish Government have or seek to have regarding the wider chemicals industry in Scotland?

The Presiding Officer: I remind all members of the requirement that their camera should be on and that contributions in the chamber should not ordinarily be made only by audio.

Kate Forbes: On the question about trade union engagement, I engaged with GMB and Unite this afternoon between 2 pm and 3 pm, and

tonight I will rush from the vote at decision time to re-engage with them at approximately 6.30 pm.

I have had a specific conversation with the company about the site. It is important that we are able to work constructively with the company to fully understand what some of the site's challenges and opportunities are.

Daniel Johnson also talked about this decision not being an isolated incident and about our wider engagement with the chemicals industry. He will appreciate from previous statements that I have given in the Parliament that we are engaging extensively with the chemicals industry. That engagement has regularly revealed a concern, which is cited by all the businesses, about the impact of high energy costs. It is well accepted by members across the chamber that overly high energy costs and the competitive disadvantage that is created across the UK by those high energy costs are having a detrimental impact, particularly for industries that are energy intensive.

I hope that my answer responds to those three questions. I am sure that there will be further engagement in the weeks to come.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): This sad news is a body blow to the hundreds of highly skilled workers and contractors who are employed at the site and in the supply chain, as well as to the wider economy across Fife and Scotland. It is a great pity—and, I think, very shoddy indeed—that the decision was leaked before the workers could be informed this morning. In that regard, all fingers are pointing to the UK Labour Government.

Will the Deputy First Minister reiterate that the Scottish Government will do all within its powers to support those who are losing their jobs and livelihoods? Will she also comment further on reports that it is, in fact, the damaging and uncompetitive economic and fiscal policies of the UK Labour Government that have led to the decision? That is the UK Labour Government that has been prepared to actively intervene for jobs in England but steps aside here and refuses to change course, as if Scotland simply does not matter.

Kate Forbes: I share Annabelle Ewing's concern about how the news ended up in the press. It is vitally important that due process is gone through when informing workers about the future of their jobs and that those conversations are confidential.

I reassure Annabelle Ewing, who has been a long-standing and excellent representative of the community that will be most affected, that we will do all that we can to support those who are losing their jobs. I am clear that the highly skilled workforce at Mossmorran plays a vital role in our

economy, and I will do all that I can to ensure that that continues.

On the last part of Annabelle Ewing's question, the business has cited four reasons that have driven it to the decision—those are set out in black and white. It talks about the challenging market, the age of the asset, the supply of ethane and UK Government policies—the economic and fiscal policies that Annabelle Ewing references. It is absolutely clear that the lack of attention being paid to Scotland's industrial base and the lack of any subsequent action in response to the challenges, which have been raised with the UK Government, are a neglect of Scotland's workforce.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

The statement highlights that a vast number of people in the wider community and supply chain rely on the Fife ethylene plant for their employment. Does the First Minister have any numbers on how many people in Fife will be affected? Considering how many people will be looking for alternative employment and upskilling, can the Scottish Government reassure Fife College that it will have the funding that is required to provide courses, given the inflexibility of the current process?

Kate Forbes: The business has shared initial data with us to aid our understanding of the workforce, and we want to continue to work with the company to ensure that we understand the full impact. The member is right. As well as the 179 ExxonMobil staff, there are contractors, who will also need support. As I said, at 6.30 this evening I will engage with the unions—Unite and the GMB—to understand how we can support those people as best we can. There are also the supply chain companies that I mentioned to Murdo Fraser, which employ staff who could be affected. We are very conscious that that tallies up to a significant number. We intend to work with the colleges and others through PACE to provide as much support as possible to every member of staff.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The ExxonMobil press statement today points the finger for the decision that it has taken at

“the UK's current economic and policy environment”.

We have heard about the high energy costs that companies face, the impact of the energy profits levy and, of course, Labour's tax on jobs, which adds to companies' woes. Labour seems quite happy to intervene in England and Wales, including at Scunthorpe, but it seems that Scots do not matter. Scotland is, once again, an afterthought. How can we change that? Do we require independence to get things right for industry here, in our country?

Kate Forbes: There have been a number of impacts on key industrial sites across Scotland in recent months, and some common threads run through them. One of those, which I have already referenced, is high energy costs. It is absolutely imperative that, where the Scottish Government can have an impact, we do so, and members have seen us take such responsibility with Alexander Dennis. Where we do not have the levers, it is important that this Parliament unites with one voice to call on the UK Government to take urgent, critical action. Where it refuses to take action, we must demand the right and responsibility to take action ourselves.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am disappointed that the Scottish Government appears to be repeating and accepting ExxonMobil's claims about its reasons for closure. To be clear, this is a company with huge profits that is making a commercial decision to close the site and cause significant job losses in Fife. This is a company that locked out more than 200 contract workers this morning and has no trade union recognition. It has shown no serious desire to engage with the UK Government, because, in reality, it had already decided to close the site.

The Scottish Government is meant to be working on a just transition for Mossmorran. Has that not involved any engagement with ExxonMobil over recent months? Over the summer, there were 150 contractor redundancies at Mossmorran. What discussions took place at that time, and did they address at all the future operational sustainability of Mossmorran?

Kate Forbes: I reassure the member that I challenge, on behalf of trade unions and workers, any decision that is taken that affects Scotland economically, particularly when it comes to our industrial base.

However, I cannot ignore the fact that, throughout each of the potential redundancy situations I referred to, businesses, independently of one another, have cited the same concerns. Those concerns—particularly the ones around energy prices—can be fixed at source by the UK Government, but they have not been. When I am led to believe that a business has engaged in good faith with the UK Government since April and that there have been no policy changes, I can assure Parliament that I will challenge the UK Government on those policy decisions, because I believe in standing up for Scottish workers and Scottish industry.

The Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if any on-going conversations would cease and we would make sure that we are listening to one another.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): This will be an incredibly concerning time for the workforce and their families. What is the Scottish Government's message to all those who are affected? Will the Deputy First Minister commit to engaging with the workforce who are losing their livelihoods?

Kate Forbes: Rona Mackay is absolutely right to highlight this as a devastating blow. Our thoughts are primarily with the workforce at the Fife ethylene plant. I recognise the valuable contribution that those individuals have made to Scotland's economy and recognise also that they are critical to our transition to net zero. We hear frequently about the importance of skills in the transition to net zero, and the workers at the plant have the skills that are essential for the just transition.

Members will understand that the news is still sinking in. However, I give a commitment that we will explore with the business, worker representatives and trade unions what support, over and above our PACE intervention, could be deployed. I welcomed ExxonMobil's commitment yesterday to play a proactive role in that process.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): ExxonMobil and Paul Greenwood should hang their heads in shame for the way that they have treated workers today in locking people out of the workplace. It is absolutely disgraceful and shameful.

For years, I have been calling for a union-led Mossmorran just transition plan in order to secure jobs and investment in the site and to cut climate pollution. In June 2024, the Minister for Climate Action told me, in this chamber, that work would be started on a Mossmorran plan "in early 2025". Where is the plan? There is no mention of it in the statement—there is just a blame game between Governments.

Kate Forbes: We worked at pace to develop a just transition plan for Grangemouth, which was published in the summer. I will need to double check this, but I think that my colleague talked about that plan being followed rapidly by a just transition plan for Mossmorran. As I said in my statement, we must now work on options and opportunities for Mossmorran as part of our wider approach to Grangemouth.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I have lived in the shadow of Mossmorran for almost 30 years, in good times and in bad times—and there have been bad times. It is an important local employer. What surprises me is that the Government is always surprised when such announcements come. It should have seen this coming, because there have been warnings for years, but we still have shocking statements in the

Parliament. When will we have a proper plan for such events, as was promised years ago, so that we can have a just transition, which the Government is brilliant at talking about but never delivers?

Kate Forbes: There has been wider engagement over an extended period, but the challenge that we face right now goes to the heart of ensuring a proper just transition. We need to support assets that are at the heart of a just transition but that face enormous challenges.

Willie Rennie talked about issues not coming as a surprise. The issues that the business has cited are not a surprise. We have been talking about high energy bills and some of the wider challenges for years. The difference is that I cannot do anything to change high energy bills. The point that I made in my statement is that, when there are risks of redundancies and risks to critical plants, the Parliament has an opportunity to speak with one voice in demanding policy changes that will secure their future. To do that, we need to know what is having the biggest impact, and it is there in front of us—today's comments from ExxonMobil regarding the plant refer to the fiscal and policy changes that need to be made.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the Deputy First Minister say more about the Scottish Government's latest engagement with ExxonMobil? Can she confirm that the business will work constructively and collaboratively on the next steps that are needed?

Kate Forbes: I have certainly made that request of ExxonMobil. It confirmed that it is willing to work with the Scottish Government on the various points that I have outlined, and I welcome the indication given to me that it will work with us to support staff. Most recently, I engaged with the company last week, on 11 November, and again yesterday afternoon.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Sadly, we are witnessing the self-inflicted deindustrialisation of much of Scotland as a result of both Governments' anti-hydrocarbon rhetoric. There are two neighbouring plants at Mossmorran. Exxon has made its announcement, but we still have the Shell natural gas liquids plant. What discussions have taken place with Shell on whether its NGL plant remains viable, given the loss of Exxon's ethylene plant?

Kate Forbes: That is a very important question, and it is precisely why my officials engaged with Shell this afternoon. Shell confirmed that its Fife natural gas liquids plant is a separate operation from the Exxon Fife ethylene plant. As such, it does not anticipate any direct impact on its Fife NGL plant operations or jobs. I hope that that gives important reassurance.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Scotland's energy industry workforce is one of our greatest assets, irrespective of where those people live. It is vital that we support skilled workers who are key to our energy security and to the delivery of a just transition. What immediate steps is the Scottish Government taking to identify options for retaining those critical skills and to protect the livelihoods of those affected?

Kate Forbes: Options for retaining skills are uppermost in my mind. As I mentioned earlier, we hear frequently about the importance of skills as part of the just transition—in fact, I think that there will be a debate on that tomorrow. Supporting workers who have the skills that we need is uppermost in my mind. We will progress a number of initiatives, including through PACE and training, and we will consider whether new projects can be phased in to ensure that we do not lose any important skills.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): It is not clear how proactive ExxonMobil has been in marketing the asset to the international market. Will the Deputy First Minister consider more proactive measures to secure international investment in the asset as well as competitive measures such as joining Shell, which operates the neighbouring plant, to consider a private-wire power purchase agreement, which could significantly reduce the energy costs of one of Scotland's most intensive electricity consumers?

Kate Forbes: I am keen to have those discussions, as the member has outlined. We can do some of that through the work that Scottish Enterprise is doing with Grangemouth on forthcoming interest, but I am conscious that there will be other interests out there. Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Government are firmly open to having conversations with anybody who has an interest in investment or in developing new opportunities at the site.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The ExxonMobil site at Mossmorran has been a cornerstone of chemical production for 40 years. The closure reflects the huge challenges that have been caused by the high-tax and low-growth policies of Labour and the SNP, not forgetting the hostile environment that those parties have created for the oil and gas sector. What action is the Scottish Government taking to limit the damage that the decision will undoubtedly cause to the workforce and the wider community?

Kate Forbes: Alexander Stewart exempts his own party, which was in government down south quite recently. I have outlined the options ahead of us. There is an option to support the skilled staff, and there is a second train of work, which we will do primarily through the task force, to look at new investment opportunities at the site. Thirdly, we

will continue to engage actively with the company, so that we understand as thoroughly as possible what impact the decision might have and what other options are available to us to safeguard the site, to support the workers and to protect the wider community from that impact.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:47

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-19809, on a committee substitute. I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Maggie Chapman be appointed to replace Mark Ruskell as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Education, Children and Young People Committee.—[*Graeme Dey*]

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

Decision Time

17:47

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first is, that amendment S6M-19739.2, in the name of Tim Eagle, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19739, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on supporting Scotland's fishing industry, 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.

17:47

Meeting suspended.

17:50

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-19739.2, in the name of Tim Eagle. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (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)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (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)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-19739.2, in the name of Tim Eagle, is: For 31, Against 82, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Rhoda Grant is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Ariane Burgess will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-19739.3, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19739, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on supporting Scotland's fishing industry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-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) (Ind)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (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)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-19739.3, in the name of Rhoda Grant, is: For 20, Against 96, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-19739.1, in the name of Ariane Burgess, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19739, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on supporting Scotland's fishing industry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (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)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 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)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-19739.1, in the name of Ariane Burgess, is: For 7, Against 108, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-19739.4, in the name of Beatrice Wishart, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19739, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on supporting Scotland's fishing industry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (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)
 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, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 38, Against 77, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-19739, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on supporting Scotland's fishing industry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not work. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-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) (Ind)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)

Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (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)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)

Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 94, Against 23, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament condemns the UK Government's damaging decision to allocate Scotland only £28 million of the £360 million Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund, which is only 7.78% of the fund; agrees that this is an entirely unfair settlement and calls on the UK Government to reverse this decision, as called for by the Scottish Government and industry stakeholders; acknowledges that Scotland previously received 46% of the EU funding allocated to the UK; welcomes that the Scottish fishing sector accounts for over 60% of the UK's fishing capacity and over 60% of UK seafood exports, and that more than 75% of all UK quota species are landed by Scottish vessels; recognises the need for continued investment to build a thriving, sustainable and modern fishing industry, which is of key importance to Scotland's island and coastal communities and the wider economy; acknowledges the range of challenges facing the fishing industry, including the ongoing negotiations with international partners to agree fishing opportunities for 2026 and the challenging advice for a number of key stocks, and further acknowledges Scotland's negotiating position, which seeks to balance sustainably managed fish stocks alongside a sustainable and prosperous fishing sector.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-19809, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a committee substitute, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Maggie Chapman be appointed to replace Mark Ruskell as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Education, Children and Young People Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Community Housing Advocacy Project

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-19003, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, on giving congratulations to the Community Housing Advocacy Project on 25 years of serving the community. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates the Ayrshire-based charity, Community Housing Advocacy Project (CHAP) on marking 25 years of service; recognises that the organisation began with volunteers offering free housing advocacy and, since becoming a registered charity in 2000, has expanded to provide professional advice and support in welfare rights, debt management and the delivery of educational sessions on homelessness awareness and financial literacy in secondary schools and colleges, alongside outreach services across Ayrshire; notes that CHAP has retained Type III accreditation under the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers since 2009, reflecting, it believes, its commitment to quality and consistency; acknowledges that the charity achieved a total of £10.4 million in financial gains for its clients between August 2021 and July 2025, helping to alleviate poverty for 1,230 individuals; commends the organisation for its independence and its commitment to offering all services free of charge, despite the ongoing challenges of sustaining operations in an environment marked by reliance on short-term, non-recurring external funding; understands with concern that few charities achieve such longevity without the security of long-term core funding; believes that advice and advocacy services, such as CHAP, save public funds while building resilience and stability in communities, contributing to both national and local strategies, and welcomes greater priority being given to safeguarding and financially supporting CHAP and similar organisations, so that they can continue to thrive and deliver value for money in Cunninghame North and across Scotland.

17:59

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I am grateful to Scottish National Party, Conservative and Green colleagues for enabling the debate to take place.

Today, we recognise an important milestone for Ayrshire and for Scotland's wider third sector community. For 25 years, the Community Housing Advocacy Project, known as CHAP, has provided guidance, advocacy and practical support to people who are facing some of the most challenging circumstances that a household can encounter. CHAP's longevity is testament not only to the necessity of its work but to the dedication, professionalism and resilience of the staff and volunteers who have shaped it over the past two and a half decades.

What began as a modest group of volunteers offering basic housing advice has grown into a respected multiservice organisation that supports individuals and families across North Ayrshire, East Ayrshire and much of South Ayrshire. When CHAP opened its doors in 2000, it operated from a small office in Stevenston, supported by community activists who recognised that a growing number of local households were struggling with household insecurity. Today, CHAP provides six service streams, employs 26 dedicated staff in its modern Ardrossan premises, and, as its most recent annual report shows, achieves a highly impressive 98 per cent client satisfaction rate.

CHAP's early volunteers saw the pain that was caused when people lacked clear information on their rights or were unable to navigate the maze of processes required to resolve disputes or prevent homelessness. From the outset, CHAP's founders understood a reality that continues to define the organisation's work today—that housing problems and financial difficulties rarely arrive one at a time but tend to cluster, often appearing suddenly and without warning. Illness, redundancy, caring responsibilities, relationship breakdown and bereavement can all destabilise a household that had previously been secure.

Despite relying heavily on short-term, non-recurring funding, CHAP has maintained its commitment to free, accessible support. Its ability to continue providing vital services in the face of financial uncertainty is a remarkable achievement that reflects not only good governance but a deep dedication to the communities that it serves, ensuring that no one is turned away because they cannot afford help.

CHAP achieved charitable status in 2000, which formalised its position in the advice sector. With that change came a period of expansion. While housing advocacy remained its core function, CHAP soon recognised the need to broaden its remit. Debt advice, welfare rights support, mediation services and, later, financial education initiatives all emerged from the same underlying purpose: to help people to regain control of their lives at moments when everything feels uncertain.

One of CHAP's most recognisable contributions today is its work in schools and colleges. Its homelessness awareness sessions, which began in the mid-2000s, were developed in response to feedback from young people who felt ill prepared for the financial realities of independent life. Over time, those sessions evolved into a comprehensive programme of financial literacy workshops covering budgeting, household bills, borrowing, savings and consumer rights. Those workshops, which are delivered with a clear focus

on prevention, equip young people with the knowledge and confidence to navigate adult life.

Alongside its educational work, CHAP has invested heavily in improving the professional standards of its advice services. Since 2009, the organisation has held type III accreditation under the Scottish national standards for information and advice providers—the highest level available. Securing and maintaining that accreditation is no small undertaking; it requires audits, staff training and consistent demonstration of excellent case management, record keeping and client care.

The outcomes that CHAP achieves speak volumes. Pro rata projections from the organisation indicate that, if every local authority had an accredited debt recovery service, more than £493 million would accrue to local economies across Scotland. Between August 2021 and July 2025, CHAP alone secured £10.4 million of financial gains for 1,230 clients; that includes £85,980 of individual debt written off last year alone. For many, those figures represent far more than improved finances, with 75 per cent of clients reporting reduced stress levels over the past year.

It is important to recognise the role that emergency Scottish Government funding has played in enabling CHAP to sustain its operations during particularly challenging periods, and I thank the Cabinet Secretary for Housing personally for her intervention in that regard. That support has allowed essential services to continue uninterrupted and ensured that front-line advisers could remain available to the people who depend so much on them.

That recognition of CHAP's value has made a meaningful difference to so many. However, CHAP's experience highlights a broader truth that is a shared experience for many organisations across Scotland's third sector. Over the past year, CHAP received 2,422 referrals, which represents a 37 per cent increase in comparison with the previous 12 months. While emergency or short-term funding can provide temporary relief for CHAP and similar organisations, long-term security is essential for organisations that deliver core services. A more stable funding landscape—one that supported core operating costs as well as project-based activity—would allow organisations such as CHAP to plan confidently, retain staff and continue to deliver the high-quality services on which constituents rely.

Initiative-itis, whereby funds are provided only for shiny new pilot projects, should never come at the expense of funding proven, impactful work that organisations know and trust will definitely help their clients. That is a practical suggestion that is grounded in evidence and common purpose.

CHAP's success demonstrates the enormous value of early intervention support. When organisations such as CHAP are given the resources to succeed, families stay in their homes; debts are resolved more constructively; young people make informed decisions; and communities become more resilient—everyone benefits.

As we reflect on CHAP's 25 years of service, we also reflect on the thousands of lives that have been shaped by its work. CHAP reminds us that communities are built not only through public services but through grass-roots organisations that understand the complexities and pressures of everyday life in their communities.

I am honoured to have the opportunity to recognise that achievement today and to celebrate the lasting impact that CHAP has had across Ayrshire and beyond, and I wish the Community Housing Advocacy Project all the very best for the next 25 years.

18:06

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Kenny Gibson on securing the debate. I am very pleased to speak in support of the motion congratulating the Community Housing Advocacy Project on an extraordinary 25 years of service to the people of Ayrshire.

The charity's origins lie in the simplest but most powerful of ideas: that everyone deserves access to independent, free and compassionate housing advice. What began with volunteers offering advocacy support has evolved into delivering professional welfare rights assistance, money and debt advice and vital outreach services across the region.

CHAP has shown what it means to put dignity, prevention and empowerment at the heart of community support. It has retained a high level of accreditation under the Scottish national standards for information and advice providers for more than a decade—that is no small achievement. Between August 2021 and July 2025, it delivered more than £10 million in financial gains for its clients. I repeat that: £10 million in financial gains for its clients. That is money going directly into the pockets of the people who need it most—it is poverty alleviated, homelessness prevented and lives stabilised. Importantly, in addition, it is public money saved through early and effective intervention.

I warmly congratulate everyone who is involved with CHAP—its staff, volunteers, trustees and partners. The organisation's commitment to providing all its services free of charge, despite operating in a funding landscape that is dominated

by short-term and non-recurring grants, is testament to its integrity and determination. Few third sector organisations manage to survive, let alone thrive, for 25 years without stable core funding. CHAP has done so because the need for its work is profound and because its impact is undeniable and it succeeds.

However, today's debate is about not just celebrating one organisation but recognising the principles that sit at the heart of CHAP's success. Those principles apply far beyond Ayrshire, including in my constituency of Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale.

The number 1 principle is prevention. CHAP intervenes before crisis hits, before someone loses their home, before debt becomes unmanageable and before a young person slips into homelessness. Prevention must be the cornerstone of our national approach to housing and poverty, especially as councils prepare for new ask and act homelessness prevention duties. Rural communities in Midlothian and the Borders know all too well that prevention is not just good policy—it is essential when services are stretched and distances are long.

Principle 2 is accessibility. CHAP takes its services into communities, through outreach and partnership, and it goes to where people actually are. For my constituents, those are places such as Innerleithen, Lauder, Stow and West Linton. Access to advice often depends on such a model. We need more organisations, not fewer, to adopt that outward-looking, barrier-reducing approach.

Principle 3 is independence. People who are facing crisis, whether it is financial, house related or personal, need advice that they can trust. CHAP's insistence on being independent and free from conflict is a core reason why individuals feel safe seeking its help.

That principle is vital across Scotland, especially in rural and semi-rural areas, where anonymity can be harder to maintain and trust is everything. CHAP treats people as citizens with rights, not as problems to be managed, and that sensitive, personal ethos is essential if we are to build resilient communities.

While CHAP's work is rooted in Ayrshire, the lessons that it offers are national. There is not a CHAP in my constituency, but we have the citizens advice bureaux, which deliver much of what CHAP delivers. Having recently visited our CABs—in particular the CAB in Penicuik—I can testify to that.

Today, we congratulate CHAP on 25 remarkable years. It is there when it is needed, and one cannot say more than that. I commend CHAP, and also—if I may, Deputy Presiding

Officer—the citizens advice bureaux in my constituency.

18:10

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank my colleague Kenneth Gibson for bringing this important members' business debate to Parliament. I congratulate the Community Housing Advocacy Project, commonly known as CHAP, on its 25th anniversary and thank it for the great work that it does. CHAP offers free housing advocacy, professional advice, support on welfare rights, debt management and education services on homelessness awareness.

On Friday, I was fortunate enough to visit CHAP in Ardrossan and meet the team members Laura, Liz, Andrea, Christine and Joyce. During that visit, I got to hear at first hand about all the excellent work that CHAP does for the community and in local schools. I was very pleased to hear that one of the areas that CHAP is working on is providing vital life skills to secondary school children. That includes lessons on how households work and managing finances at home, including gas and electricity bills, mortgage payments, car payments and budgeting.

We all know how important it is to equip our youngsters in school with the right skills. Those skills will not only benefit them in the long term but assist them to help their parents. Those preventative measures will help not just individual households but, in the long term, the Government, as people will be less reliant on public services, which will—we would hope—result in less pressure on the public purse.

After all, according to the Sutton Trust,

"96% of teachers think life skills are as or more important than formal academic qualifications in determining how well young people do in adulthood".

That is of particular interest to me as, a couple of years ago, I put forward a policy that would involve teaching children such basic life skills. However, in order for CHAP and other organisations to be able to conduct those important lessons, they need to be properly funded. Right now, CHAP is the only independent organisation in Ayrshire that is delivering such work in schools and the community. Inadequate funding, which leads to instability, could prevent that work and other important projects from happening.

Another greatly challenging issue that CHAP highlighted to me was the lack of connectivity and public transport in Ardrossan and the surrounding areas. I heard at first hand from one of the employees that she relies solely on car travel from Dalry to Ardrossan—a privilege that not everybody has. Connectivity and access to good public transport are important, both socially and

economically, for towns such as Ardrossan, especially as the rate of unemployment in North Ayrshire is above the Scottish average. Good transport links help people to join the job market and make their everyday lives easier.

I hope the cabinet secretary, in her closing remarks, will join me and other members in congratulating CHAP on its great work and its 25th anniversary and will outline how the Scottish Government will address some of the challenges that I have mentioned.

18:14

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan): I thank Mr Gibson for his motion and for his on-going support and advocacy for the Community Housing and Advocacy Project, which is clearly a valued support for many in his constituency. I also thank him for providing the opportunity for me, on behalf of the Government, to reflect on the truly life-changing work that is delivered by the third sector across our country, including, of course, by CHAP, which complements and contributes to the Scottish Government's priorities.

I have listened carefully to contributions during the debate, and I am heartened that members across the chamber so value the work of community-based organisations such as CHAP, which we all know are often a lifeline for struggling households. I have also heard their concerns about the fragility of the third sector, and I want to cover that in my remarks.

First, however, I am delighted to acknowledge the inspirational volunteers who founded CHAP and those who have carried its mission forward over 25 years. Their determination and commitment will undoubtedly have changed thousands of lives across Ayrshire. The Scottish Government recognises the skills, kindness and commitment of volunteers, and I put on the record, on behalf of the Scottish ministers, our thanks to them all.

Volunteers are the backbone of our third sector. They are the invisible threads that bind communities together. Hundreds of volunteers step forward and give their time freely. They make an extraordinary contribution to other people's lives and support the wellbeing of our communities the length and breadth of the country. They are people who make vital contributions without fanfare and without reward, simply because they believe in a better society. Of course, volunteering benefits the volunteer as well, building skills, enhancing employability and supporting physical and mental wellbeing.

Our rich and vibrant third sector continues to make Scotland a better place. Although we invest

heavily to support those organisations, I recognise the real pressures that they face, given the financial context. In light of that, we are committed to doing all that we can to improve their sustainability.

In that respect, we are delivering on our commitment to develop a fairer funding approach by providing more multiyear funding to third sector organisations that are delivering front-line services, providing the opportunity for the long-term planning and development that we know is so important. In that regard, Kenny Gibson recognised the funding that the Scottish Government has offered to CHAP this year to help to sustain its debt service while it explores sustainable funding solutions. That is vital support for the local community, given that there is an absence of other advice services in the area.

Christine Grahame: The cabinet secretary will be aware that many in the voluntary sector are suffering from the national insurance increase for employers, which is impacting on many charities. Should the United Kingdom Treasury look again at the impact that that has had on the charitable sector?

Màiri McAllan: Yes, I whole-heartedly agree with that. Every third sector organisation or charity that I meet, virtually without exception, will mention to me the strain that the national insurance contribution change has placed on them. We will continue to advocate for the UK Government to change that policy, and I make that call again today.

I want to put on record how important a role support services play in contributing to the Government's central aim of eradicating child poverty in Scotland and, ultimately, freeing children from the harm, pain and limitations of poverty. Members will know that we are due to publish by the end of March next year our third child poverty delivery plan, which will set out the actions that we intend to take in pursuit of our targets. I can be clear today that the third sector will be an important part of that.

We are also working with local authorities to deliver the fairer futures partnership programme. Supported by key local third sector organisations, it is tailored to local areas and co-designed with the community and is now working in 16 areas across Scotland, including North, East and South Ayrshire. It is important that we turn that best practice and groundbreaking work into business as usual.

I also want to mention the importance of that work to my housing portfolio. I spend a lot of time working with people who have lived experience of homelessness, and they often reflect three key points. First, as Kenneth Gibson alluded to, they

tell me that, although most people can withstand one issue going wrong in their lives and many will be able to deal with two, most people who end up with two, three or four cumulative problems in their lives will find themselves unable to cope. That often leads to homelessness.

Pam Gosal: As the cabinet secretary said, many components are important to people's lives, including jobs, housing and good connectivity. It would be good to hear a little about connectivity, because CHAP brought up that issue. It is great that there is multiyear funding coming into the area, but I would like to hear a bit more about connectivity, which is important to the many small towns that we have in Ayrshire in enabling people to access not only jobs but the services that are provided by CHAP.

Màiri McAllan: I quite understand the demographic that Pam Gosal highlights, because it is reminiscent of my constituency, where there is no single major centre of population and there are lots of towns and villages. I am very seized of the issue that she mentions, and I know that the transport team in Government is, too. We are determined to work together to make sure that, for example, what the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice is doing in her portfolio and what I am doing in housing can be facilitated by what the transport team is working on.

Kenneth Gibson: The core issue for organisations such as CHAP is the insecurity of funding. Much of their resources has to go into chasing project funding—£10,000 here, £20,000 there—and it is extremely difficult for them to maintain a strong service, particularly when they have to be involved in all sorts of multifactorial issues that face individuals. Would it not be much more cost effective for the Scottish Government to ensure that, instead of organisations having to spend so much time chasing small amounts of money, there is solid core funding that enables them to consolidate the work that they do, thereby ultimately saving the Government money and people a lot of the pain that they have to go through if they do not have organisations such as CHAP to rely on?

Màiri McAllan: Absolutely. I know that Mr Gibson has a keen understanding of those issues, owing to his time and position on the Finance and Public Administration Committee. He will understand that the Government itself has been bound by annualised budgets, which has had a knock-on effect on the third sector and others that we fund. Increasingly, we are seeking to move away from that arrangement and, through measures such as the fairer funding pilot work, we are trying to institute multiyear funding more often, because we understand the benefits that it offers in terms of planning and delivery.

I am conscious that I am over time, but I was just reflecting on the fact that people who have lived experience of homelessness raise three key points with me, the first of which is multiple issues going wrong. The second point is another that Mr Gibson reflected on, which is the energy that it takes to bring oneself out of a period of difficulty.

The third point—I will conclude on this—is the one that people with lived experience of homelessness raise most often with me, which is the importance of relationships that can help them to go from the period of crisis that they are in to a period in which they can move on with their lives. I think that that speaks, perhaps most of all, to the value of an organisation such as CHAP. As well as its exceptional expertise, it ultimately provides a human face, a kindness and a presence on the ground in our communities, standing shoulder to shoulder with people who need support, building relationships with them and, in doing so, building a bridge to the support that they need. I conclude by saying that that relationship, that expertise and that presence in our communities is absolutely central to the Government's aims of eradicating child poverty and providing warm, safe and affordable homes as a foundational part of that.

Meeting closed at 18:24.

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