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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 16 September 2026

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

Portfolio Question Time

Justice

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is justice. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. I remind members that questions 3 and 4 have been grouped together and that I will take any supplementaries on those questions after both have been answered. Questions 5, 6, 7 and 8 have also been grouped together, and I will take any supplementaries on those questions after question 8.

Vietnamese Children (Trafficking)

1. **Amanda Bland (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of a recent Police Scotland freedom of information response indicating that there have been 342 referrals involving south-east Asian children since 2020, including 31 cases of sexual exploitation, what action it is taking to ensure that Vietnamese children at risk of trafficking are identified at an early stage, protected from exploitation and provided with appropriate support. (S7O-00220)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Kirsten Oswald): Child trafficking is a horrific form of child abuse that can have a devastating impact on children and young people. In all cases, the child's safety and wellbeing must be paramount, and support is provided through Scotland's child protection system.

Tackling human trafficking requires a co-ordinated response involving the Scottish Government, the United Kingdom Government, Police Scotland, local authorities and specialist support services. The Scottish Government provides more than £2 million annually to guardianship Scotland, which provides specialist support to all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, victims of trafficking and children who are vulnerable to trafficking who arrive in Scotland.

Amanda Bland: What assessment has the Scottish Government made of whether the current systems for identifying and recording child trafficking adequately capture the specific circumstances of Vietnamese children, including those who may initially be treated as missing children or immigration cases? What action will it take to improve early identification and information sharing between agencies?

Kirsten Oswald: I am grateful to the member for that question and its focus on partnership working. There is data that tells us, year on year, how many children from Vietnam appear to have come here through trafficking. That data indicates that those children may be subject to forced criminality. That has been the primary reason for referrals since 2020.

Regardless of the type of exploitation involved, a child who is suspected of being the victim of trafficking or exploitation should receive an appropriate protection response, and the work with statutory safeguarding partners that the member alluded to is absolutely key in that regard.

Counterfeit Cigarettes

2. **David Barratt (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address the criminal trade in counterfeit cigarettes in local communities, including what support it provides to trading standards departments. (S7O-00221)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Kirsten Oswald): I recently met the Scottish Grocers Federation to discuss the impact on legitimate traders of illicit trade. I fully recognise the harm that is caused to businesses by such illegal activity.

We are committed to doing everything that we can to disrupt that damaging activity. We work with trading standards and law enforcement partners, and we are engaging with a range of stakeholders, as well as with the United Kingdom Government's high street serious organised crime unit. In addition, we are considering what further action can be taken to tackle high street criminality. That includes reviewing the framework for closure orders and any changes to the law that may be required to strengthen enforcement.

David Barratt: I thank the minister for that response and for her prior engagement on the matter. I am aware of one shop in my constituency that has no planning consent that is selling counterfeit cigarettes at a third of the normal retail price, undercutting legitimate businesses. The trading standards department is aware of the situation, but it has told me that it lacks the powers to shut down the shop in question. Will the Scottish Government's review include giving more powers to local authorities to shut down such shops and take organised crime off our high streets?

Kirsten Oswald: It is important for the member, trading standards or anyone who has such concerns to report those crimes to Police Scotland.

Trading standards officers already have a wide range of enforcement powers available to them. They can seize illicit tobacco, take enforcement action, seek prosecutions and apply for banning orders, working closely with HM Revenue and Customs and Police Scotland to tackle organised crime.

Tackling illicit tobacco remains a priority for the Government and our partners. Through operation CeCe, for example, partners including Police Scotland have seized more than 1.8 million illicit cigarettes and more than 1,100kg of hand-rolling tobacco in Scotland during 2025-26, which demonstrates the significant enforcement activity that is under way.

In addition, the Scottish Government is currently reviewing antisocial behaviour legislation, which includes the framework governing closure orders and whether changes there would strengthen enforcement.

David Linden (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP): I pay tribute to the minister, who has been an advocate on the issue of vapes as well as on counterfeit tobacco.

My colleague Mr Barratt is absolutely right that there is a role for trading standards departments here, but the reality is that trading standards departments have been hollowed out over many years, and we do not have as many staff. I ask the minister to work across Government, particularly with her colleagues in the education department, to ensure that more apprentices are going into regulatory standards so that we can empower trading standards officers to shut down the types of shops that are selling counterfeit tobacco.

Kirsten Oswald: I am grateful to Mr Linden for his focus on this area. He will know that responsibility for workforce planning rests with individual local authorities and with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, in their role as employers. Nonetheless, it is an important point, and there has been a conversation on progress there. The Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform asked Consumer Scotland to make proposals under section 3 of the Consumer Scotland Act 2020 to help inform the Government's approach to trading standards services in Scotland. That report has now been received, and we are looking at recommendations in order that we can be as effective as possible in this area.

Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): Does the Scottish Government accept that the growth of counterfeit tobacco is a sign that organised crime is gaining a foothold in local communities?

Kirsten Oswald: Organised crime is of serious concern to the Scottish Government, and it affects communities in Scotland and further afield. That is why the record funding that has been provided to Police Scotland by the Government is so important, given Police Scotland's ability to make the best operational decisions in order to deal with criminality where it exists. The connection that the member has made between organised crime and the problem of illicit tobacco is a very valid one, and I would assure him that it is a matter of ongoing consideration for the Government.

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): Back in March 2024, Fife Council's trading standards team made use of detection dogs provided by Consumer Protection Dogs UK. That resulted in the confiscation of nearly 3kg of suspected counterfeit roll-up tobacco in one operation. Can the minister confirm whether the Government has considered providing more detection dogs to all relevant bodies that investigate the manufacture and sale of those dangerous items?

Kirsten Oswald: I recently visited some of the detection dogs that the member speaks of, and I was very impressed by their effectiveness. I have been given other evidence to indicate that, as one of a range of measures, they provide a helpful tool to help us detect and deal with that particular kind of crime. The actions of local government, trading standards and Police Scotland in their operation are really for them to determine, but the member makes a valid point, highlighting the value of that as one element that we can use.

Domestic Abuse Victims (Rural and Remote Communities)

3. **Andrew Baxter (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address any barriers faced by victims of domestic abuse in rural and remote communities. (S7O-00222)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): Our equally safe strategy recognises that women in rural and island communities may experience distinct barriers to seeking support. Therefore, our programme for government commits to ensuring that every woman and girl, regardless of where she lives, has access to safe and sustainable services. That includes developing a new multiyear fund for specialist organisations, responding to what they need to sustain vital services and deliver critical preventative activities, and allowing them to respond flexibly to local needs. Further details will be set out in the next equally safe delivery plan, which will be published later this year.

Andrew Baxter: Victims of domestic abuse in rural communities can face additional barriers in

accessing specialist support, particularly where those services are spread across vast geographical areas. As part of the cabinet secretary's plan, will he commit to a specific rural domestic abuse delivery plan that will be backed up by secure long-term funding for local women's aid services and other specialist services, so that where a woman lives does not determine the support that is available to her?

Neil Gray: The equally safe delivery plan that will be published later this year will have at its core the elements that Mr Baxter is asking for. He should take confidence in the fact that the delivering equally safe fund has benefited from a 5 per cent increase in funding this financial year, which takes funding to £23 million per year, with total investment being almost £46 million. Of that, £5.6 million is going to projects that support women and girls in our most rural and island communities. I am more than happy to continue a conversation with Mr Baxter about how we can ensure that the delivery plan meets the needs of women and girls in rural and island communities.

Domestic Abuse and Gender-Based Violence Support (Rural and Coastal Communities)

4. **Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will ensure that women and girls in rural and coastal communities who experience domestic abuse and gender-based violence have equal access to specialist support and protection, including through the criminal justice system. (S7O-00223)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): Our programme for government commits to ensuring that there is equal service provision for women no matter where they are and recognises the vital role of the criminal justice system in responding to such behaviour. I welcome the fact that more women are coming forward to report crimes, including historical ones, and the fact that there has been an increase in prosecutions and convictions, especially for current and historical sexual violence. Through the implementation of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025, we will establish a sexual offences court as well as introducing statutory rights of anonymity and access to independent legal representation.

Karen Adam: The Parliament heard evidence that Grampian Women's Aid workers had to make up to 60 calls to find one legal aid solicitor for a woman who was experiencing domestic abuse. For a woman who is already in crisis, that is another barrier and another delay to accessing justice. With the Government consulting on legal aid reforms, how will the cabinet secretary ensure that women who are experiencing domestic abuse can access timely legal advice and representation regardless of where they live?

Neil Gray: That was a topic of conversation during my meeting with Dr Marsha Scott from Scottish Women's Aid this morning. We discussed the work that Scottish Women's Aid is taking forward in its project to embed legal advice in Orkney and Shetland as well as in Edinburgh, which the Government is providing funding for. We considered how that might be spread more widely, as well as the fact that we are consulting on reforms to legal aid, and I encouraged Scottish Women's Aid to feed into those discussions.

I recognise the concerns that Karen Adam has raised on behalf of Grampian Women's Aid about the difficulties that someone who has been experiencing domestic abuse faces in accessing timely legal advice and representation. We remain committed to supporting women who have been affected by violence and abuse, including through the provision of funding for the Scottish Legal Aid Board, the Scottish Women's Rights Centre and other organisations.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): The cabinet secretary will know that the Scottish Greens and others have repeatedly called for multiyear, inflation-proof funding and for full cost recovery for the life-saving services that support survivors of gender-based violence. Can the cabinet secretary confirm whether that will form part of his budget discussions with colleagues? Will he consider the introduction of a set of core minimum service standards that every survivor of gender-based violence would be entitled to access?

Neil Gray: That goes to the heart of the violence against women and girls section in the programme for government, which I know that Maggie Chapman has taken a keen interest in. It talks about ensuring that we have multiyear funding available to support services and the need to shift our justice posture towards a more preventative approach. That would mean that we have services available in the community for women and girls, as well as better wraparound family support and a public protection posture to ensure that there are fewer victims in the first place. That will form part of the budget discussions that I expect to have with my Cabinet colleagues.

"Criminal courts backlog follow-up"

5. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report by the Auditor General for Scotland, "Criminal courts backlog follow-up". (S7O-00224)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): We welcome the Auditor General's report and its recognition that justice partners have made

progress on reducing the criminal courts backlog since the original audit. The report also highlights the increasing volume and complexity of serious cases that are entering the justice system and the challenges that that creates. We recognise the distress that undue delay can cause and the need for further action to ensure that victims see justice happen as quickly as possible.

We accept the recommendations and we will continue to work closely with justice partners to strengthen collaboration, improve delivery and support the long-term reform that is needed to ensure that Scotland's justice system remains effective, resilient and focused on the people that it serves.

Neil Bibby: In 2023, Audit Scotland recommended that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service developed equality impact assessments for all change projects within 12 to 18 months. Forty months on, despite a legal duty to carry out those assessments and the importance of considering in advance how reforms could affect groups such as women and children, the Auditor General told the Public Audit Committee last week that they are not being carried out as they should be. Can the cabinet secretary explain to the people who those reforms are meant to be helping why the Government has failed to properly consider them and carry out that basic legal requirement?

Neil Gray: The report recommends strengthening equality impact assessment arrangements and ensuring that they are applied consistently across reform programmes. Assessments are routinely carried out and published in relation to new legislation, but we recognise that the practice is less consistent in other areas of policy development and delivery. We therefore accept that recommendation and will continue to build on the existing work to support best practice in that area.

Court Proceedings (Backlog and Waiting Times)

6. **James Adams (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce the backlog of cases in Scotland's courts and reduce waiting times for court proceedings. (S7O-00225)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): We recognise that the shape of criminal court business is changing, which places renewed pressure on the system, and that we need to respond accordingly and in recognition of the distress that delays can cause. From January, High Court capacity will increase to 26 trials a day, compared with 16 at the start of the decade. We are also responding through changes that we are taking forward with justice partners and stakeholders. We are supporting the delivery of modern user-centred digital services, including expanding digital evidence-sharing capability and providing targeted investment to support a more efficient trauma-informed justice system.

James Adams: The High Court backlog has continued to rise to more than 1,000 outstanding scheduled trials, which is almost three times the pre-pandemic level. Audit Scotland found that the Scottish Government's justice programme board has not met since summer 2024 and that its own modelling shows that High Court backlogs and waiting times are projected to continue growing until around March 2028.

In the light of Audit Scotland's findings that the progress in criminal justice efficiency projects has been mixed, with some initiatives having still not started, limited evaluation and no equality impact assessments having been completed, what urgent steps will the Government take to address those issues and ensure that victims, witnesses and accused individuals are no longer subject to prolonged delays?

Neil Gray: I have already set out that, as of January, the number of High Court venues will increase by four so that, in addition to the current 10 venues, the High Court will sit in Airdrie, Dunfermline, Edinburgh and Glasgow sheriff courts. We also have strong lessons to learn from summary case management improvements. In his report, the Auditor General sets out significant improvements that have been made on reducing the court backlog of summary cases.

However, I am very aware that we have more work to do in relation to solemn cases. Because of the increased successful prosecution and police investigation work, for which I pay tribute to Police Scotland and the Crown, we are seeing more and more complex cases coming forward that need to be dealt with. I will continue to work with justice partners to ensure that they have the resources that are required to get through the backlog as quickly as possible.

High Court Trials (Waiting Times)

7. **Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that waiting times for High Court trials are expected to almost triple by 2028. (S7O-00226)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): As I said in my earlier answers, from this January we will increase the number of trials to 26 trials a day, compared to 16 at the start of the decade. I have met the Lord President and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service to discuss the issues at hand on a number of occasions. We will work with them, and with other justice partners,

to explore what more can be done to address the challenges that our justice system faces. We will also invest £11.6 billion across justice from 2026-27 to 2028-29 to support front-line services, safer communities and victims and witnesses.

Finlay Carson: One of my constituents has now been waiting years for her case to be heard in the High Court. Despite facing multiple serious charges, the accused remains at liberty in the community on bail, while my constituent is left in limbo. When she sought answers, the response from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service was that the delay was, in their words, "understandably disappointing". However, for victims of rape and serious sexual offences, it is not merely "disappointing".

The offences themselves, the years of uncertainty, and the knowledge that the accused remains free are traumatic, exhausting and deeply distressing. The Scottish Government repeatedly promises a trauma-informed justice system, yet many victims feel that, currently, the very system that is meant to support them is letting them down. Will the cabinet secretary meet me and my constituent to hear directly how those failures have affected her? Does he accept that, right now, with victims left waiting years for trials while accused people remain on bail, the system is not trauma-informed but retraumatising?

Neil Gray: First, I recognise the trauma and distress that Finlay Carson outlined in relation to a victim seeking justice. I, of course, understand that. He will also understand that the scheduling of business is for the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service and that decisions around bail are for the judiciary to take. I know that he is aware of that. I would be more than happy to meet him and his constituent to discuss that case, recognising the independence of the organisations that we are talking about.

High Court Trials (Waiting Times)

8. **Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that waiting times for High Court trials are set to triple by 2028. (S7O-00227)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): As Ms Mochan has heard, we are aware of the potential and predicted waiting times for trials. Sexual offence cases now make up around 70 per cent of High Court trials, and the number of cases continues to increase due to increased reporting and prosecution, which I think that we would both welcome.

I recognise that it is vital that we find a sustainable way of managing those cases and improve on current waiting times, as well as mitigate any future delays. In time, the sexual offences court—an initiative that was not supported by the Labour Party—will play a key role in helping us to manage the growing pressure on the courts and the impact that it has on victims.

Carol Mochan: The cabinet secretary mentioned that sexual offences crimes account for 70 per cent of High Court business. A recent report by the Scottish Women's Convention found that only 8 per cent of surveyed respondents felt that women have fair access to justice in Scotland. In last night's debate about violence against women and girls, we heard that access to justice and support services can be extremely challenging and that geographical inequalities persist. Given the Government's commitment to tackling those issues, will the cabinet secretary tell us whether the Scottish Government will lodge a draft misogyny bill in Parliament before Christmas recess?

Neil Gray: In direct answer to the last part of Ms Mochan's question, we have a programme for government commitment to progress the misogyny bill as a year 1 bill. I will also continue to work to ensure that women are well served in our justice system.

As I said in answer to Ms Mochan's first question, the fact that we are seeing a higher rate of police investigation and charges being brought, a higher rate of prosecutions being taken forward and longer sentences demonstrates the improvements that are being made in our justice system to ensure that women are being better served.

There is more work to do. Indeed, exemplary contributions in yesterday's debate highlighted the gravity of the situation that we face. That is why the First Minister has made violence against women and girls such a prominent issue in his time as First Minister and has ensured that it is central to our programme for government.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): One of the highlights of the report on the summary case management project in the summary courts, which the cabinet secretary has already touched on, through which we had earlier resolutions without trials and 18,000 fewer witness citations, including 11,000 fewer police witness citations, which obviously freed up police resources. Could that be rolled out in solemn courts as well?

Neil Gray: I welcome Alan Brown's question, which highlights the incredible measures that my predecessor took to improve summary court management. Some areas of learning can be taken into the solemn cases, but solemn business is a bit more complex. I am looking to work with justice partners to make similar improvements in how we work in solemn business to those that

have been delivered through the summary case management project.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Question 9 has been withdrawn and a reasonable explanation has been given.

Policing and Community Safety Initiatives (Rural Areas)

10. **Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to increase funding for policing and community safety initiatives in rural areas, in light of recent data indicating upward trends in criminality in Dumfries and Galloway. (S7O-00229)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Kirsten Oswald): Police and police staff play a vital role in keeping our communities safe, which is why we are investing record funding of more than £1.7 billion in policing in 2026-27.

Although decisions on the deployment of officers and staff, operational policing priorities and the allocation of resources across local areas are matters for the chief constable, Police Scotland continues to place significant emphasis on community policing and engagement with local communities, including in rural areas such as the member's.

As is set out in Police Scotland's 2030 vision and three-year business plan, community policing remains central to keeping people safe, and our record investment is ensuring that Police Scotland has the resources that it needs to respond to local demands across the country.

Craig Hoy: Overall crime rates in my local policing division have hit 552 per 10,000 residents, which is 3.5 per cent higher than in the previous year. In 2023, police numbers in Dumfries and Galloway were the lowest in Scotland, but, in recent weeks, local officers, led by chief superintendent Claire Dobson, have been touring towns and villages with a recruitment van to generate a pipeline of new officers, and I commend them for that positive and visible initiative.

Does the minister accept that it is more difficult to recruit officers in rural areas? What more can the Scottish Government do to support Police Scotland, both financially and practically, as it seeks to attract new recruits in hard-to-hire areas such as Dumfries and Galloway?

Kirsten Oswald: I am grateful to Craig Hoy for his focus on the importance of police officer numbers. Of course, we have more officers per head of population in Scotland than there are in England and Wales. Our officers also receive the best basic pay in the United Kingdom at the minimum and maximum of each rank, which is really important when we think of recruitment decisions.

Our record investment in policing continues to allow Police Scotland to recruit new officers, with more than 160 new recruits in July 2026 and further recruitment planned throughout the year. Police Scotland has confirmed that there is a healthy recruitment pipeline. I commend Craig Hoy for his focus on and support for Police Scotland as it goes about the important work of ensuring that we have a proper pipeline of recruitment in place.

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): In recent months, there has been a worrying rise in the number of reported incidents of vandalism across my constituency. In Tain, a high street shop and the much-loved rose garden suffered significant damage. In Thurso, homes and cars were vandalised and even the entrance of Thurso police station was targeted. What action will the minister take to ensure that local officers have the resources that they need to tackle such crimes? Will she heed calls from across the Highlands to restore the local control that was lost following the centralisation of policing?

Kirsten Oswald: It is really important that policing has a local focus in more rural areas, as the member has described. Rural crime can impact on individuals, communities and businesses, which is why the local focus that Police Scotland has is so vital as it goes about its business.

There is also the focus of the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime, known as SPARC. That organisation is chaired by Police Scotland and brings together key justice, enforcement and rural sector partners to ensure that there is a co-ordinated, multi-agency approach to preventing and reducing crime in more rural areas. SPARC also supports intelligence gathering and enforcement, in order that there is practical crime prevention activity taking place in communities such as the member's.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I will take a brief supplementary question from Jamie Langan.

Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform): Would the minister concede that the closure of more than 200 police stations has disproportionately affected public safety in rural areas such as the Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire?

Kirsten Oswald: Police Scotland's important focus on making its own operational decisions so that the chief constable is able to determine where and how best to deploy officers is central to both preventing and detecting crime. In all localities,

significant partnership working is going on between partners and Police Scotland, which ensures that we have a local focus while appreciating that deployment is a matter for the chief constable.

Health and Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next portfolio is health and care. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

I will give the members on the front bench a moment to take their places.

Grampian's Radiology-Assisted Chest X-ray Evaluation Project

1. **Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of NHS Grampian's GRACE project and its use of artificial intelligence in detecting lung cancer. (S7O-00230)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care (Angela Constance): NHS Grampian is responsible for delivery and evaluation of the GRACE project, which was developed through the north of Scotland innovation hub. It is worth putting on record that NHS Grampian is the first board in Scotland to use AI in a cancer pathway.

The Scottish Government has considered learning from the GRACE project as part of the development of a national approach to delivering an AI-enabled chest X-ray pathway across NHS Scotland to support earlier diagnosis of lung cancer. That work is being progressed through our accelerated national innovation adoption pathway, which brings together Scottish Government and NHS Scotland partners to assess evidence and take collective decisions on innovations for national adoption.

Jack Middleton: Given the obvious success of the GRACE project in NHS Grampian, as the cabinet secretary has touched on, and its integration into the lung cancer pathway, can the Scottish Government commit to a full national roll-out of that transformational project and give members an understanding of the phasing of that roll-out?

Angela Constance: In July, the Scottish Government and national health service leaders approved a national chest X-ray AI programme. Work is now progressing with NHS boards to establish the national reporting hub and put the necessary clinical, digital and governance arrangements in place over the next 12 months. We are shortly moving into that 12-month pre-implementation phase to finalise the clinical pathways. That supports the once-for-Scotland approach to a wider roll-out, helping to identify lung cancer earlier and speed up treatment.

The Scottish Government and partners have also been developing a policy framework for AI and recently published interim guidance, following discussions with trade unions, on how AI can better support staff to deliver high-quality care, in addition to the plan to develop an AI hub to accelerate safe adoption of AI in health and care settings.

Musselburgh General Practitioner Walk-In Clinic

2. **Kate Campbell (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it anticipates that the GP walk-in clinic in Musselburgh will be operational. (S7O-00231)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care (Angela Constance): As a Government, we have made a clear commitment to expand walk-in services, including in Musselburgh. That is part of improving access to care and reducing pressure on accident and emergency services. Although I have approved the inclusion of a service in Musselburgh as part of the expansion of the pilot, it is for NHS Lothian to design and deliver the walk-in service, and to determine when a safe operational date will be.

Kate Campbell: I welcome the Musselburgh clinic, which will be a lifeline for the local community. However, the issue of access to healthcare is coming up in other parts of the constituency that I represent, in areas such as Tranent. That demonstrates the huge demand for such services.

On Monday, I met representatives of Queen Margaret University, which is keen to support community health on campus and would like to maximise the use of its facilities while supporting learning. Will the Scottish Government support that type of innovative approach? Will the Government continue to look at opportunities to expand community healthcare across a range of settings?

Angela Constance: Ms Campbell raises an important point about improving access to same-day primary and community care to respond to local population health needs. I welcome the interest that Queen Margaret University and other local partners have shown. We are always willing to explore opportunities that could improve access to community-based healthcare.

As the member suggests, it is important that we continue to think about how we make best use of community facilities and local assets. As set out in the new "Health and Care Improving Flow Plan 2026-2031", we are developing a national vision

for community infrastructure, which includes the role of community hospitals, GP surgeries and other local facilities that can play a vital role. We will set out further detail on that soon.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The British Medical Association has described GP walk-in clinics as

"short-term, headline-grabbing … non-evidence-based initiatives".

The cabinet secretary has said that those clinics will take the strain away from acute services such as accident and emergency. However, A and E data shows that Scotland had its worst summer on record for those waiting more than eight hours for treatment. Can the cabinet secretary explain why she is continuing to pursue that policy against the expert advice of GPs, when the money could be better spent and invested in improving access to existing health centres?

Angela Constance: I am well aware of the BMA's views, and I am also aware that there are a range of views on the matter. I stress that it is not either/or. We are investing heavily in GP care through £1.3 billion of core funding and £531 million of additional funds over three years, all of which is part of a bigger package of investment in primary care.

We have 900 GP practices across the country. The walk-in services are about complementing the work of GP practices and supporting them to do what they do best in terms of continuity of care and the family doctor role. However, same-day access is crucial to preventing problems from becoming a crisis, and we have to respond to the need.

The member is right to raise the challenges around accident and emergency—those are the reason why we are taking a whole-system approach and looking at health and social care together.

National Health Service Boards Reform (Neurodivergence Assessment and Support)

3. **Calum Kerr (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers that its proposed reform of NHS boards will make it easier to access appropriate assessment and support for neurodivergent people, particularly adults. (S7O-00232)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs (Maree Todd): The proposed reform of NHS boards provides an opportunity to think differently about how services are planned and delivered, including for neurodivergent people. We will work closely with NHS boards during the reform process to support joined-up approaches across health and social care and community services, ensuring that patients remain at their heart.

Just last week, we announced a £7.6 million neurodevelopmental support fund for children and young people to help to strengthen local support for children and families. That is part of work that is being taken forward with local government and partners across Scotland. As the member is aware, we have committed to adopting the Royal College of Psychiatrists' national pathway for neurodevelopmental conditions for adults, and we will publish our route map in the autumn, setting out how that will be taken forward so that adults with neurodevelopmental conditions—with or without a formal diagnosis—can be better supported.

Calum Kerr: I thank the minister for that comprehensive answer. In NHS Borders, there is currently no pathway for adult attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autism assessment unless someone is in a mental health crisis. I hear from constituents who have struggled to access treatment after moving to the Borders, because diagnoses that are recognised elsewhere are not accepted. I recognise the steps that are being taken to address that, including an NHS Borders workshop this month to look at demand for and capacity in neurodivergence services. However, we need reassurance from the minister that improving access to assessment and support for neurodivergent adults will be a priority as the reforms progress.

Maree Todd: I am absolutely willing and happy to reaffirm today our commitment to supporting the needs of people with neurodivergence, including adults.

I recognise and am sympathetic to concerns that have been raised about access to adult pathways in NHS Borders and the challenge that is faced by the board. NHS Borders is responsible for taking decisions on planning and delivering services. We fund the national autism implementation team—NAIT—to support all health and social care partnerships to meet their responsibilities on neurodevelopmental pathways and services, and that activity is complemented by our plans on the national route map.

I also recognise the issues around private diagnosis. I would be more than happy to correspond with Calum Kerr or to hear from him on particular issues. Those are clinical matters that take account of patient safety, professional guidance and local governance arrangements. Through NAIT, we have published guidance on prescribing ADHD medication to adults following private sector diagnosis in Scotland. That was drafted in consultation with professional bodies and clinicians and shared with all health boards.

Joe Long (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank Calum Kerr for raising the question and the minister for her comments on the topic at the Health, Care and Sport Committee this morning. What level of resource has the Scottish Government identified as necessary for the sustainable roll-out of improved neurodevelopmental assessment and support pathways, and will that be in December's budget?

Maree Todd: There will certainly be investment in mental health and in child and adolescent mental health services in December's budget. We are at an early stage of development; as we discussed this morning at committee, we are at a relatively early stage of building an entirely new system that is necessary to respond to the needs of the vastly increased number of people who are coming forward to seek diagnosis and support. I mentioned some of the funding that we have put in to develop cohesive services for children and young people—the £7.6 million that was announced last week—and I look forward to updating the member on further investments as we develop the system.

Miles Briggs (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con): Charities and organisations that support people in Scotland who are neurodivergent have expressed intense disappointment that the learning disabilities, autism and neurodivergence bill was not included in the programme for government, and today we have heard that there is no vision for what the Scottish Government wants to do. People across our country have been left in limbo, as members have highlighted. Will the minister confirm today whether, under Government reforms, we will see the development of a pathway for adults and children in the NHS?

Maree Todd: Let me be absolutely clear: the fact that we are not progressing with the LDAN bill does not mean that we are deprioritising learning disabilities or neurodevelopmental disorders. We are fully and absolutely committed to responding to those issues.

Part of the challenge is that there has been a sharp increase in the number of people who seek diagnosis and support, which has overwhelmed our current systems. We are having to build, from quite a low baseline, an entirely new system that can cope with a very high volume of referrals.

We are absolutely committed to ensuring that children, young people and adults get the right support, in the right place and at the right time—at the point at which they request it. At the moment, the focus is very much on diagnosis, because that is seen as a way of getting support. However, what people actually want is support, which is what I am focusing on building in our communities.

IVF Treatment (African and Asian Donor Eggs)

4. **Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the availability of African and Asian donor eggs for in vitro fertilisation—IVF—treatment within the national health service. (S7O-00233)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs (Maree Todd): I recognise that there has been interest previously in findings by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in relation to the underrepresentation of Asian and black egg donors in the donor population.

The availability of donor gametes for use in national health service in vitro fertilisation treatments is a matter for NHS boards. I expect boards to meet the needs of all people who are eligible for NHS IVF treatment and who require donor gametes for their treatment. However, we are looking more broadly at the availability of gametes in Scotland, and I would be happy to consider any specific concerns that Alan Brown is keen to raise.

Alan Brown: The underrepresentation that the minister speaks about has been illustrated by the experience of my constituents James and Nkechi, whose NHS-funded IVF treatment is currently on hold due to a lack of donor eggs of African ethnicity. That means an unknown wait for them, and possibly age restrictions kicking in for the mum-to-be. They have come up with a solution themselves, as they have offered to buy donor eggs, but NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is advising that they cannot undertake a mix of private and NHS treatment, even though they want to use a partner clinic of the NHS assisted conception service. Is there any way that a compromise can be found for couples such as my constituents in those circumstances?

Maree Todd: I absolutely appreciate your constituents' concern, and I confirm that the Scottish Government expects NHS boards to meet the needs of all couples who are eligible for NHS fertility treatment and who require donor gametes, whether that be eggs or sperm, for that treatment. We have always been very clear that couples should not pay for any aspect of their NHS IVF treatment, and that includes the purchase of donor gametes. That is the responsibility of NHS boards, and I am happy to pursue the matter further with the relevant board if Mr Brown would care to write to me with more details.

Day Centres for Older People (Glasgow)

5. **David Linden (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the

Glasgow health and social care partnership regarding funding for day centres for older people. (S7O-00234)

The Minister for Community Care (Alison Thewliss): I recognise the value of day centres for older people and the important role that they play in wellbeing and socialisation. I understand that there is a review under way as part of a wider programme of work that Glasgow health and social care partnership is undertaking to secure future financial sustainability. I understand that staff and unions are currently being consulted on the future shape of services, but no decision about those specific services has been made at this stage.

David Linden: Of the 10 day care centres for elderly people in Glasgow, two are in my constituency, in Baillieston and Springboig; I visited them in recent weeks. The minister is right to recognise that the decision is one for the health and social care partnership. However, any decisions that might be taken on the future of those services would have an impact on loneliness and isolation, not to mention removing the vital middle step between living in the community independently and the crisis of going into permanent residential care. Would the minister therefore back my calls to the HSCP to keep those things in mind as it makes those decisions?

Alison Thewliss: I note that the member's constituency has two services, in Baillieston and Springboig. I also have a service in Drumoyne in my area, so I am not averse to discussions on the matter. I note that Glasgow health and social care partnership has published figures showing that 661 service users were attending per month, against a capacity of 1,500 places. However, I note what the member says about consultation and involvement and the importance of the services to the local community, and I have asked my officials to keep in close contact with Glasgow health and social care partnership to understand any changes that it seeks to make.

Energy Costs (People with a Terminal Illness)

6. **Irshad Ahmed (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what model of financial support it is considering as part of its programme for government commitment to provide additional support with energy costs for people with a terminal illness, including its plans and timings for delivering this work. (S7O-00235)

The Minister for Community Care (Alison Thewliss): We are determined that everyone receives compassionate and high-quality care, and that should be no different at the end of a person's life. In our programme for government, we have committed to working with key stakeholders on how we will best deliver further support for the energy costs of those with a terminal illness. Supporting that outcome will be a cross-Government priority; delivery plans will be developed over the coming months and Parliament will be kept updated.

It is important, of course, that I point out to the member that he may also wish to engage with his United Kingdom Labour Government colleagues on the steps that they could be taking more widely to reduce energy costs for households.

Irshad Ahmed: The need for good palliative care was a real point of cross-party agreement at the end of the previous session of Parliament. What assurance can the minister give me that the palliative care delivery plan is leading to better end-of-life care and that services are receiving more support?

Alison Thewliss: Work is already under way to deliver on the actions that are set out in the strategy delivery plan. For example, in January 2026, we launched Scotland's first palliative care learning hub, which provides free palliative care education resources. In addition, palliative care guidelines have been developed by a multidisciplinary group of professionals and are available on the right decision service website and application. Work continues in that area.

Gender Identity Services (Waiting Times)

7. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether the commitment in the programme for government "to ensure that, by the end of 2031, no one waits more than 26 weeks for treatment" applies to all forms of healthcare, including gender identity services. (S7O-00236)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs (Maree Todd): It is important to recognise that waiting times for accessing gender identity services remain unacceptably long, and I am fully aware of the impact that that can have on people who are waiting and on their loved ones.

The 26-week target that is set out in the programme for government relates specifically to elective in-patient and new out-patient waits. It covers about 40 specialty pathways that patients follow in accessing acute surgical and medical specialist services on a scheduled basis, including orthopaedics, ophthalmology and cardiology. To support that work, we have announced a further £90 million of funding to help patients who are waiting the longest for elective treatment.

We continue to support specialist gender identity services. Since December 2022, we have invested almost £8.5 million, including more than £7.2 million that has been provided directly to health boards that deliver those services in order

to improve service delivery and reduce waiting times.

Patrick Harvie: Many of my constituents who have been waiting years will be deeply disappointed if an apparently clear statement in the programme for government simply does not apply to them. As the minister will know, in Glasgow, waiting times even for a first appointment can be more than five years and waiting times for treatment are measured in the decades. It is simply unrealistic to imagine that we can go on in this way. Does the minister accept that nothing less than transformational change is necessary and that that must include the decentralisation of those services?

Maree Todd: I recognise the situation that Patrick Harvie has described, and I agree that we need to think about a different way of delivering care. We recognise that performance is not yet at the level that we all want at certain gender identity clinics, particularly those run by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Over the summer, I had the privilege of visiting NHS Highland gender identity clinic, which is functioning really well. I was delighted to hear about the reconvening of the managed clinical network, which will provide an opportunity for areas to share expertise and good practice in order to improve performance across the country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Questions and answers should be briefer.

Gary Bouse (Falkirk West) (SNP): Can the minister speak about the specific staff recruitment challenges with gender identity clinics? Does she agree that, as parliamentarians, we should all be mindful of the language that we use so that people who access those services feel supported?

Maree Todd: Gary Bouse is absolutely right. Gender identity healthcare services are specialised, and clinics across the United Kingdom have reported challenges in workforce recruitment and retention. As I said, since December 2022, we have provided more than £7.2 million of investment directly to health boards that deliver such services in order to address those challenges.

In the background, such services have been the subject of highly polarised discourse, at the centre of which are real patients and the hard-working staff who support them. The clinics have cited toxic media discourse as a factor in recruitment difficulties, and I profoundly agree that all politicians here should be mindful of that when speaking about the matter.

Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): Given the continued pressures on the national health service, can the minister confirm that reducing waiting times for patients with life-threatening and clinically urgent conditions will remain the first priority in meeting the 26-week target?

Maree Todd: It is not a case of either/or. We know that, relative to the wider population, trans people continue to suffer poorer outcomes in mental and physical health. We are committed to promoting, protecting and realising the right to health of everyone in Scotland, including trans people. In my answer to Patrick Harvie, I gave details on who is included in the waiting time target and where the funding is going.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Question 8 was not lodged.

Type 1 Diabetes Services

9. **Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the provision of services for people with type 1 diabetes across Scotland. (S7O-00238)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs (Maree Todd): Improving outcomes for people living with type 1 diabetes is a priority for this Government. The health secretary wrote to all national health service boards in May to ask them for an update on their provision of hybrid closed-loop systems, as we provide baseline funding of £14.4 million for that each year.

I expect NHS boards to ensure that they are delivering on national policy and providing hybrid closed-loop systems in line with clinical guidance and individual clinical need, including for children and young people living with type 1 diabetes.

Adam Harley: My constituent Christine Esson has been in contact with me to raise concerns about the withdrawal of central funding for hybrid closed-loop systems for those living with type 1 diabetes and the migration away from the support provided by the national team. Although Ms Esson will not lose access to the system, what she has highlighted raises questions about others gaining access to it.

Can the Scottish Government reassure Ms Esson that those living with type 1 diabetes do not see a reduction in their support and care due to the changes, and will it ensure that diabetic patients are not subject to a postcode lottery of care?

Maree Todd: Let me make it absolutely clear that we have not withdrawn funding and that we have not instructed NHS boards to cease the provision of this technology—in fact, absolutely the opposite. We have provided £14.4 million of baseline funding from this year onwards to support provision.

The centre for sustainable delivery is looking at the expansion of access to hybrid closed-loop systems, but I want to take this opportunity to make it clear to the chamber that we have not asked anyone to cease prescribing those systems while we wait for the centre to report on its work.

The member has mentioned the on-boarding system, which has proven to be very effective. That system, which has ensured equity of access and treatment across the country, is also part of the centre for sustainable delivery's work.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Following on from Adam Harley's question, I want to ask what action the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that people with type 1 diabetes who have been assessed as clinically eligible for insulin pump therapy have timely and equitable access to that treatment, regardless of which NHS board they receive their care from, as that has been a bit of an issue for some of my constituents. Moreover, what oversight does the Government, in general, have of NHS board funding and waiting times for insulin pump provision?

Maree Todd: I recognise that, over the years, there have been challenges with equity of access for a number of people across Scotland. Baselining funding in the way that we have is meant to provide certainty to every health board area that the funding is and will continue to be there, and that should iron out some of the inequity of access. We are also using the centre for sustainable delivery to improve delivery of and access to the support that is required to on-board people on to the system, and we have asked it to do a further piece of work on introducing this approach and expanding access to it.

The challenge probably highlights one of the most crucial issues facing our NHS at the moment and one of the strongest reasons for reforming how we deliver our NHS—that is, tackling the geographical inequities and unwarranted variation that we have in Scotland. The opportunity of reform gives us an opportunity to improve that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I must ask for shorter answers from the minister to allow more back benchers to ask questions.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Around 35 per cent of adults with type 1 diabetes in Dumfries and Galloway are currently using insulin pumps, and a further 251 patients are clinically suitable for the therapy. However, some have been waiting for more than 12 months for it, because demand is outstripping available resources.

Does the cabinet secretary accept that it would be a false economy to allow access to insulin pumps and hybrid closed-loop systems to stall because of local budget pressures, when evidence shows that those technologies improve outcomes and reduce the risk of costly long-term complications? If so, will the Government guarantee that NHS boards have sufficient funding to meet rising demand for type 1 diabetes technology?

Maree Todd: I thank Mr Carson for the promotion. I am delighted to be addressed as the cabinet secretary.

All the work that I have outlined, and the £14.4 million baseline funding, are intended to ensure that health boards have certainty that the funding is there and will continue to be there, year after year, to support provision. Closed-loop systems are now an established part of diabetes care for people with type 1 diabetes in Scotland. Guidance from the Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network and the Scottish Health Technologies Group has set out the position that closed-loop system technology should be the standard of care for people with type 1 diabetes who wish to use it, and we are targeting our funding to ensure that it is absolutely in every part of Scotland.

Kidney Dialysis Services (Argyll and Bute)

10. **Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Argyll and Bute health and social care partnership and NHS Highland regarding the provision of kidney dialysis services to ensure that people are receiving treatment close to home. (S7O-00239)

The Minister for Community Care (Alison Thewliss): I appreciate Ms Minto's campaigning on that issue. We engage regularly with NHS boards and health and social care partnerships on the planning and delivery of renal services, including dialysis provision.

Decisions on the location and configuration of dialysis services are, however, for NHS boards. We recognise the importance of providing care as close to home as possible and support a range of approaches, including satellite dialysis units and home dialysis, where appropriate.

Our programme for government commits to shifting more healthcare closer to home through a community-first approach that maximises the opportunities for people to get the care that they need in their home or local community.

Jenni Minto: As a result of the dialysis unit in Campbeltown being temporarily closed due to staff recruitment issues, constituents are having to travel to Glasgow for their dialysis. There is also a campaign, which I am supportive of, to provide dialysis in Lorn and Islands hospital in Oban to avoid people having to travel to Fort William. It

concerns me that, at crucial points in people's health journeys, decisions are being made that do not put people at the heart of them, as the minister indicated they should.

As the reform of the NHS in Scotland progresses, how will the Scottish Government ensure that concerns about perceived reductions in care are not ignored as we rightly move to a sustainable health service?

Alison Thewliss: I understand Jenni Minto's concerns about the people in Campbeltown who are affected by the changes to their services and about the impact that the changes are having on their lives.

We will actively engage with patients, carers, communities and staff as the reforms are developed, which will ensure that local experiences help to shape those future services. A key objective of the reforms is to strengthen community-based care and improve access to services closer to home, wherever it is safe and clinically appropriate to do so.

Hyperscale Data Centres

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-01177, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on hyperscale data centres. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak button now.

15:02

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I want to be clear from the outset what this debate is and what it is not.

In this country, and around the world, a wide debate about the use of artificial intelligence is taking place. There are concerns about risks, there is hype about opportunity and there are proposals for regulation, kill switches and a development slowdown.

Today's debate does not assume a position that is either pro or anti the technology itself. It is also not about blanket opposition to data infrastructure. We recognise that it has a role to play in our modern society and economy, but that must be within limits and it must serve the public good rather than just developers' profits.

Today, we ask the Parliament to recognise the scale of what is being proposed and the policy vacuum that it is happening in. In March, the Scottish Government's AI strategy made it clear that the phrase "green data centre" has not been defined; it still has not been defined. The strategy also addressed the need for guidance, but the Government is pressing ahead with data centre development zones before that guidance even exists.

Communities around the country are really concerned about the local impacts, including the sheer physical scale of these developments, noise impacts and local air pollution, but it has taken until today for the Government to require environmental impact assessments.

Our biggest concern is about energy. That includes heat that will go to waste unless heat networks are built, with serious financial contributions from the developers. Nonsense phrases such as "heat network ready" just will not cut it.

However, even before we get to that point, the scale of electricity demand that we are talking about is staggering. The first 24 proposals—

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I do not disagree with many of the points that Patrick Harvie is making. What frustrates me is that we are trying to cram all the key points that he mentioned into a very short debate in which many

of us would have liked to speak, but there is simply no time. We had a full debate on this topic only two weeks ago, when members from across the chamber expressed their views. Not a single member of the Green Party turned up for that debate. Why not?

Patrick Harvie: We have brought a motion for debate and vote, which others did not.

Just the first 24 current proposals would equal one and a half times Scotland's peak electricity demand, and the Government wants to attract even more developments of that kind. That scale is clearly implausible, especially at a time when Scotland's clean energy should be used to cut people's bills and decarbonise our heating and transport. However, no strategic approach is being taken—

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Is it not the case that part of the solution to the energy consumption of AI data centres involves the use of small modular nuclear reactors, which will be used elsewhere in the world to power such developments?

Patrick Harvie: If the member wants to come back in a few decades' time, when that is remotely plausible, he is welcome to do so.

No strategic approach is being taken to determine how much of Scotland's energy can be given over to that one industry, sustainably and without harmful consequences.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Will Patrick Harvie take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I will take one more intervention.

Maggie Chapman: A multibillion-pound hyperscale data centre has been proposed at Blackdog, just north of Aberdeen, in my North-East Scotland region. The proposal is for an initial capacity of 600MW, with ambitions to scale that into multigigawatts in the future.

Does Patrick Harvie agree that it is simply not possible for Aberdeenshire Council—or, indeed, any local authority—to make informed and strategic decisions on an application of this scale, especially when we still do not know what the eventual impact on the electricity grid will be?

Patrick Harvie: Absolutely. It is simply impossible for local planning decisions, made on a piecemeal basis, to take account of national strategic issues, whether around fossil fuel back-up, grid stability or prices.

It is not just we Greens who say that it is time to press pause on the roll-out of that infrastructure. Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, Friends of the Earth Scotland, Action to Protect Rural Scotland and the Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland are saying the same thing.

It is not just the environment movement, either. In Parliament this week, academic witnesses shared many of our concerns about energy prices. Councils in local authority areas such as Edinburgh and East Ayrshire want clarity as well, instead of being left to make decisions in isolation. In July, the Scottish National Party's national council backed a motion from its Kirkcaldy and Inchkeith branch, which called on the Scottish Government to introduce a moratorium. SNP MSP David Torrance described that decision as

"a very welcome and important step".

Stuart McMillan MSP wrote an article in his local paper to "welcome the decision", saying that it

"provides the Scottish Government the time to clearly define green data centres and to devise a strategy that works for Scotland."

I ask SNP members to ask themselves today how they can justify voting against what their own party has decided and what their own communities are asking for. Let us press pause and take the time that is needed. Indeed, let us give the Government the time that it needs to do that work and put Scotland's interests ahead of those of the big tech giants.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the introduction of a moratorium on planning applications for new hyperscale data centres until a national strategy and updated planning guidance are produced, which takes into account the cumulative impacts on energy demand and the environment.

15:08

The Minister for Public Finance (Hannah Mary Goodlad): I welcome the opportunity to give the Scottish Government's opening remarks in this debate on data centres. As the minister with portfolio responsibility for Scotland's planning system, I fully recognise the vital role that that system will play in considering applications, harnessing economic opportunities and finding solutions that align with our climate goals.

The debate concerns challenges that many countries are now facing: the economy that we want to build, how we meet our climate objectives and, as will be vital, how we ensure that local communities share in Scotland's future prosperity.

I acknowledge the issues and questions that members have raised with me, and previously in the chamber, about the potential impact of large-scale data centres. Those include valid questions about the implications for our energy infrastructure and for water use, the environmental impacts and, of course, the potential impacts on host

communities. Those are all reasonable points and legitimate concerns, and I hear the voices of communities. That is precisely why I have taken substantive action on the matter over the summer and will take more such action.

Over the summer, I issued a planning direction requiring planning authorities to notify the Scottish ministers of new data centre applications with a power capacity beyond 50MW, which will mean that any such application will come across my table within seven days of its being submitted, so that I can ensure that the Government has strategic oversight of the matter. I also recalled a planning appeal for a ministerial decision relating to a proposed data centre in Edinburgh.

That is why, today, we have gone even further, in confirming that we will issue a new direction that will require an environmental impact assessment to be undertaken for all applications, new and existing, for new data centres with a power capacity that exceeds 50MW.

Monica Lennon (Glasgow) (Lab): I hear what the minister says about increasing strategic oversight for the Government and giving more control to ministers, but can she explain why no guidance exists for planning authorities, which have been having to deal with such applications up until now? In the absence of such guidance, there has been no comfort or certainty for communities.

Hannah Mary Goodlad: This is an opportunity to get things right from the start. Whenever there is a new industry, we always try to retrofit planning in hindsight, but we now have an opportunity to get things right at the start, to ensure that we bring communities with us, to set the definition of a green data centre and—

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Will the minister give way?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: I am still answering, and I will continue with that answer.

The Scottish Government is being asked to do two things: to take a national perspective on the issue and to ensure that our planning process and planning guidelines enable local communities to take decisions as well. Therefore, we need to strike a careful balance in the national guidelines that will be produced.

We are minded to support the Labour amendment, but we think that we can be more ambitious. We want to come back with guidance on the issue in three, rather than 12, months' time—by Christmas. We want to be more ambitious in providing guidance and direction.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green): Will the minister take an intervention?

Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD): Will the minister take an intervention?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: I will give way to Adam Harley.

Adam Harley: I am glad that the Government has finally committed to providing clear guidance. Will it publish that guidance as a matter of urgency? Does the minister agree that inappropriate sites such as Westerhill in my constituency—speculation is leading to applications for data centres on such sites—should be ruled out, full stop?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: It is a question of having the right site in the right location and with the right connection to grid, along with the potential for using waste heat. That is exactly why I want to have strategic oversight of the issue. Adam Harley raises an important point. I have therefore issued guidance that means that I must be notified of any application for a data centre with a capacity of more than 50MW. That will enable me and my colleagues to look at the issue in the round.

Gillian Mackay: Will the minister take an intervention?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: I would like to make some progress, if the member does not mind.

Today, we are going further by confirming the issuing of a new direction that will require EIAs to be carried out across the board, which will come into effect by tomorrow.

Therefore, I assure the Parliament that the Government absolutely recognises the need for careful scrutiny of planning applications and of their likely impacts on the environment and our communities. We recognise that people expect decisions to be taken transparently and on the basis of robust evidence. It is essential that the public and the Government have confidence in the process. That is why I have taken steps to secure that and why the Government is being ambitious by saying that we will come back with guidance by Christmas.

However, I do not believe—

Craig Hoy: Will the minister give way?

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

David Barratt (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Will the minister take an intervention?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: I knew that this was going to be quite a topical debate. I will give way to Mr Barratt.

David Barratt: The Greens' motion asks for a moratorium on planning applications until the planning guidance is developed, while the

minister's amendment sets out that the guidance will be in place by the end of the year. Is the practical difference between those two positions whether a handful of speculative applications are lodged in the intervening period? Is the reality not that no decisions will be made before the end of the year anyway? Is the outcome not the same?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: I have been engaging heavily with my planning officials and with local authorities on this matter. It is important to state that, in any business development, in any origination of any industry, a number of speculative applications are always put into the system. It is highly unlikely that we will see decisions taken before Christmas.

Gillian Mackay: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: It would be speculative to give a number that would progress to the capital expenditure and operating expenditure stages.

I will make some progress, as I am well aware of the time.

We do not agree that there should be a moratorium. That is not necessary, it is not appropriate, and it would send the wrong message to anyone looking to invest in Scotland. We cannot prevent planning applications from being lodged, nor should we. Applicants have a right to receive a timely decision. Rigorous scrutiny of a proposed development by capable planning professionals, backed up by environmental assessment, is more appropriate than a blanket suspension of all developments regardless of their merits.

It is important not to lose sight of why these developments are being proposed. The world economy is becoming ever more dependent on digital infrastructure. Data centres support cloud computing, research, advanced manufacturing, financial services and the delivery of public services themselves. Scotland's digital ambitions recognise the strategic importance of the infrastructure. For several years, Scotland has sought to position itself as a location for low-carbon digital infrastructure, building on our own renewable energy resources, connectivity and skilled workforce. The Scottish Government believes that economic growth and environmental responsibility must go hand in hand.

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister give way?

Alan Brown: Will the minister take an additional intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The minister cannot take any interventions. She is already in additional time, and she must begin to wind up her speech.

Hannah Mary Goodlad: I am very happy to continue this debate and discussion outwith the chamber, but I have already taken a substantial number of interventions, so it is fair enough that I should continue and then conclude.

Our objective is to ensure that we have in place the proper and effective planning here. The reality is that all major infrastructure presents both opportunity and challenges. I am very clear that this is an opportunity for Scotland. I was once taught the phrase that you measure twice and you cut once—and that is exactly what we are doing. We are committed to coming back before Christmas with guidelines that will give business and communities confidence.

I move amendment S7M-01177.5, to leave out from "agrees" to end and insert:

"believes new hyper-scale data centres in Scotland will only be approved where they have met robust environmental impact assessments, which will take account of any impact on the amenity of any neighbouring communities; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to the swift creation of national planning and spatial guidance by the end of the year for the determination of conditions, under which data centre development should be permitted; believes that, in order to gain planning approval, any proposals for data centres should demonstrate how they would minimise emissions for their energy usage and not impact on water usage and how community wealth benefit will be built in to the business case; notes that best practice for the creation of data centres includes steps to support decarbonisation and to recycle waste heat for wider community use; recognises the increased utilisation of AI and further development of such technology, and calls for strong domestic regulation of and international collaboration on the development and use of AI systems to ensure its safe and ethical use, and to address the scale and seriousness of potential threats the use of AI may pose now and in the future."

15:18

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): Just under two weeks ago, I brought a members' business debate on AI data centres to Parliament. That was the first chance that MSPs had had to debate the issue, and the consensus was overwhelming. With the exception of the Greens, who sadly boycotted the debate, everyone, across the parties, agreed that the Government needed to produce guidance on what constitutes a green data centre and on what the parameters should be in approving or rejecting applications for them. That is what is needed, and it has been needed for months now. The minister has had all summer to produce that piece of work, and she has not done it. She has managed to bring out a book on wild saunas, but she has not produced what communities up and down the country and potential investors in Scotland need, which is certainty.

I would like to think that the debate two weeks ago sent a signal to the Government that it needs to pull its finger out. It may have helped to focus minds. Most members recognise the opportunity for Scotland in attracting AI and hyperscale data centre investment, but the opportunity must come with limits, standards and scrutiny. Communities, councils and investors need certainty about where those developments should and should not go, and how many data centres Scotland needs. Let us be clear: Scotland should not turn its back on data centres, but nor should we allow major developments to proceed unchecked. The scale of what is proposed underlines why national guidance is needed, and quickly.

Twenty-three hyperscale data centres have been proposed across Scotland, with 21 already in the planning system. Many of those are in the central belt, including Central Scotland and Lothians West. If approved, the proposed centres would use 7.3GW of power, compared with peak winter power demand in Scotland of around 4GW. Data centres already consume around 2.5 per cent of the United Kingdom's electricity, and demand is projected to rise significantly by 2030. Data centres are critical national infrastructure and support banking, healthcare, transport, public services and the wider digital economy.

The developments that have been proposed in Scotland could support thousands of construction jobs and apprenticeships, as well as hundreds of long-term jobs. The Intelligent Land Investments—ILI—Group says that its proposals in Fife, North Lanarkshire, and East Ayrshire could create one of the world's largest hyperscale data centre clusters and position Scotland as a global digital infrastructure hub.

The region that I represent is at the epicentre of the hyperscale data centre rush, and people are worried. I have been clear throughout my political career that massive developments in the green belt should not be supported, just as they should not be supported on prime agricultural land or areas of natural beauty.

Monica Lennon: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Graham Simpson: Do I have time to take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Yes.

Monica Lennon: I am grateful to Graham Simpson for securing the debate a couple of weeks ago. It is important that communities believe that the Parliament is listening, so I thank him for his work on the issue. I heard the minister say that it is highly unlikely that decisions would be made before Christmas, but that is not a guarantee that there will be a pause. For communities who are concerned, including those in the member's region, does he agree that an official pause, as proposed by Labour's amendment, would provide comfort that we can take the time to get the guidance right?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We do not have much time, so interventions must be shorter.

Graham Simpson: Interventions must be short. Well, my response is short. We need the minister to do her job and produce the guidance, which will give people the certainty that they require. I heard what the minister said, but she needs to be emphatic and crystal clear that the guidance will be produced before the end of the year. She needs to say that. She can intervene on me, if she wants to.

Mark Ruskell: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Graham Simpson: She does not want to intervene on me.

Hannah Mary Goodlad: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Members: Oh!

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Unfortunately, Mr Simpson, you agreed to only four minutes with your business manager, so you cannot take any more interventions.

Graham Simpson: How sad.

The Government has moved on environmental impact assessments, which is good. The Parliament has pushed it in that direction, but the Government needs to go further and produce the guidance that everyone who spoke in the debate two weeks ago called for and that all sides in this polarising debate want. I wish that the minister would stand up at some point—

Hannah Mary Goodlad: I did!

Graham Simpson:—and promise that, because if she does not deliver, she will not be forgiven, and we will be back here.

I move amendment S7M-01177.1, to leave out from "agrees" to end and insert:

"recognises the importance of data centres to Scotland's digital economy; notes however growing concerns regarding the cumulative impacts of hyperscale developments on energy demand, water resources, agricultural land and local communities; believes that greater certainty is needed for communities, planning authorities and investors alike, and calls on the Scottish Government to urgently publish national guidance defining what constitutes a green data centre, setting clear environmental standards and prioritising development on appropriate brownfield and industrial sites."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Paul Sweeney to speak to and move

amendment S7M-01177.3. Mr Sweeney, you have only four minutes.

15:24

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute on the critical issue that is being debated. When we talk about the cloud and the digital economy, there is a tendency to treat them as something that is ethereal or abstracted from our daily lives, but the reality is that they are inherently physical. Data centres are vast engineering undertakings. As economic enablers, they underpin everything from the national health service to our world-leading university research, as well as the day-to-day operation of Scottish businesses. They are increasingly important national infrastructure.

The UK sovereign AI fund's £100 million rapid AI research and development procurement competition is a welcome initiative for founders to take on four national challenges: a national health service with more time for patient care; defence that keeps Britain safe; computing power to underpin British AI sovereignty; and ideas that keep our country cyber resilient.

However, in Scotland, today, we are leaving the architectural and industrial footprint of the 21st century entirely to private interests. In Scotland, the Government's failure to urgently and proactively engage with the economic potential and risks of data centre development means that council planning authorities' decisions on private sector planning applications are ad hoc and not led by good national guidance. We are allowing our industrial landscape and our grid capacity to be dictated by speculative private landlordism, with an inherently discretionary and reactive planning system. That is a profound abdication of strategic responsibility by the Government, and that is not a new problem. Three years ago, I asked the Government what its policy was on data centres, and it described the current picture as 10 data centres. We now have 15 in Scotland, with 23 proposed, so we need to rapidly catch up with the planning infrastructure to underpin it all.

My colleagues in the UK Government grasped the scale of this industrial transition, and Darren Jones MP rightly articulated that we must move from a legacy bureaucratic state to a modern digital state, leveraging this technology to upgrade our industrial base, secure better jobs—freed from tedious time-consuming tasks—and transform public services. Similarly, the Minister for Artificial Intelligence has underscored that domestic data centre capacity is a matter of national sovereignty and economic resilience. We cannot simply leave the physical engines of our future economy to overseas control.

However, to deliver on that, we must face the stark engineering realities. Data centres are major consumers of power and water. To understand the scale of what we are dealing with, running at its full terawatt hours, the proposed Cato data centre would consume nearly 8 per cent of all electricity generated in Scotland in 2024. Plans for new data centres should balance our future data needs, energy sufficiency, environmental impact, economic potential and job creation. Would the minister require current proposals to be retrospectively subject to environmental impact assessments?

Instead of developer-led chaos, we need coherent national infrastructure planning. Energy firm RWE recently highlighted the necessity of co-locating data centres at existing power station sites to bypass grid bottlenecks, reduce constraint payments to renewable generators and ease transmission congestion. That is exactly the sort of spatial and industrial master planning that the Government must lead on. It is obvious to me that the locations for the first wave of new data centre developments in Scotland are staring us in the face: our established coastal and thermal power station sites at Hunterston, Torness, Cockenzie, Longannet and Chapelcross. Those locations already possess the industrial profile required: high-voltage grid connections, abundant ambient cooling water along the coastline, flat brownfield industrial land sited well away from residential amenities, and communities with an existing established heritage in the energy industry.

Hannah Mary Goodlad: Given that we seem to be in the same space with regard to spatial and national planning, I am very surprised that the member will not commit to joining us in our ambition to publish this guidance in three months' time. Why the need for 12 months?

Paul Sweeney: We have not had clarity from the Government on the detail of what it is proposing. We need clarity on exactly what it is proposing in the guidance and on its scope. We have precedent for this in Scotland. A century ago, Britain's electricity supply was a fragmented parochial mess, much like our current approach to hyperscale data centre planning. It took a Glaswegian industrialist, Lord Weir, to sort that out, through the creation of the national grid. He did not rely on piecemeal decisions but delivered a synchronised national system. After the second world war, it was a pioneering Secretary of State for Scotland, Tom Johnston, who led the creation of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board to realise the vision of power from the glens, refusing to leave rural electrification to private speculation. That sort of unified civic-minded planning is what we need today.

Scotland has great strengths in data science and energy, but a codified coherent industrial development plan is urgently required so that we can maximise the economic benefit, in terms of both jobs and wages, as AI centres develop, as well as have community benefit from economic returns. We have the opportunity to build the industrial architecture of the future, but it must be done by national design, and not by private speculation, so I urge members to support the Labour amendment.

I move amendment S7M-01177.3, to insert at end:

"believes that Scotland has great strengths in data science and energy, and as such, a clear industrial strategy is required to maximise the economic benefits of AI data centre developments, including jobs and wages; calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward a clear definition of what constitutes a hyperscale data centre and to issue national planning guidance, alongside robust environmental standards and assessments, to inform national and local decision-making on current and potential hyperscale data centre planning applications; notes that such guidance must provide clarity on spatial, community and social impacts of any such developments and that decisions must be based on community consent; agrees that consideration must be given to implementing community benefit schemes and adjusting the non-domestic rates regime or other tax measures to ensure that economic benefits are accrued by communities in which such data centres are sited; calls on the Scottish Government to report back to Parliament on the development of national planning guidance by the end of the current calendar year and to publish this guidance in full within 12 months, and believes that no decisions on planning or consenting in relation to such applications should be made until this has been completed."

15:29

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I recognise the concerns that have been discussed today, and that we are all facing, regarding data centres in our communities across Scotland, including two in my constituency in the Borders.

Residents want to know what these developments will mean for them, their landscape, their road connections, their water usage, their electricity and their communities. How will it affect their communities? They deserve clear answers before we endeavour to make any planning decisions. More important, I am very concerned about speculative planning applications for data centres that are not currently subject to full planning. I wrote to the Government on 31 July; I have the letter here. However, I am still waiting to hear back.

I understand and recognise the concerns. However, I am also cognisant of the economic opportunities and benefits that data centres can bring, including to Scotland's sovereignty over AI and to our digital economy. Almost everything that we do depends on our ability to work online, and Scotland should be a place where we encourage investment and create skilled jobs in the process.

However, instead of implementing robust guidance that would encourage investment, the SNP Government has dithered all summer while dozens of these hyperscale applications have piled up; and, instead of being clear with the public by addressing their concerns with belt-and-braces guidance, it has shirked its responsibilities. Over almost 20 years in government, the pattern has become familiar: it publishes a strategy, then drifts for years, and leaves councils, communities and investors without the certainty that they need.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I really appreciate Rachael Hamilton speaking on behalf of her constituents; indeed, we share some of the same constituents. People are asking for a moratorium in order that we can pause and ensure that we get this right. Would she say that that is the request of the vast majority of her constituents?

Rachael Hamilton: The answer, quickly, is no.

In June, the First Minister said that he was giving active consideration to guidance. However, 12 weeks on, none of that has been published.

Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform): Will the member take an intervention?

Rachael Hamilton: In a second.

Gillian Martin admitted that ministers had not undertaken a wholly national assessment of cumulative impacts and, five years on from publishing its green data centre strategy in 2021, ministers still cannot provide a formal definition of a green data centre.

We therefore welcome today's announcement that all data centres will be subject to an environmental impact assessment. We called for that: we asked for an EIA as an interim safeguard while national guidance is being developed. That is a sensible and proportionate step that gives communities greater protection very quickly.

I will take the intervention now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member is in additional time, and so cannot take an intervention.

Rachael Hamilton: I will wind up.

I am confused by the Labour amendment, which is about giving time to publish guidance. However, the Government is saying that it will publish guidance within three months while not saying that any applications will be paused. I find that a little bit of a dichotomy in relation to the motion.

15:33

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): Scotland, like society more widely, is at a crossroads. Every online purchase, bank transaction, streamed programme, healthcare appointment and cloud-based business service now depends on data at a large scale and, as that demand grows, our digital infrastructure must keep pace. We have a responsibility to be honest with our constituents. Data centres are critical national infrastructure. They are vital not only to economic resilience and innovation but, increasingly, to the public services on which we all rely.

Nor can we simply expect other countries to host the digital infrastructure that Scotland needs. As the Ministry of Defence has warned, Governments and businesses will increasingly depend on access to data to make decisions. Data sovereignty is therefore a matter of national security, and outsourcing our data infrastructure overseas risks leaving our defence and intelligence capabilities vulnerable.

Carol Mochan: Does David Green agree that, with the way that things stand at the moment, it is multinational corporations who will own these data centres? The sovereignty of the data is therefore not part of this debate.

David Green: I do not think that we can come to the chamber and have a serious debate about data centres if we do not recognise that, as I have just said, they underpin our defence and intelligence capabilities and the public services on which we all rely. Although there is a debate to be had about data ownership, which we should take up with Government, we must not lose sight of that point.

The issue before us is not whether Scotland needs digital infrastructure but whether Scotland has a planning framework that is capable of delivering it in the right way. That is the question that the Government must urgently address.

Let me be clear: none of that means that the current system is working, because it is not. Scottish Liberal Democrats share the worries and concerns that communities have raised across the length and breadth of the country. They are right to say, as we have heard in the debate, that some sites will be appropriate for data centres and some will not.

Mark Ruskell: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

David Green: I will take my colleague's Duncan Dunlop's intervention.

Duncan Dunlop: The point about appropriate sites is key because, in principle, some are correct and some, as we can see, are not. In the South Scotland region, which I cover, a data centre is proposed in the Lammermuir hills, which would essentially mean the industrialisation of great big chunks of unspoilt countryside—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Interventions must be short; they are not speeches. They need to be crafted in such a way that they make a point to which the speaker can respond.

Duncan Dunlop: The point is that we have heard that Chapelcross, which is the site of a former power station, is an entirely appropriate place for us to invest in. Does my colleague agree that members right across the chamber should be clear about which proposals in their constituencies and regions they support and which they do not? Otherwise, we will see seas of mistrust.

David Green: My colleague has put his view on the record at great length. I will have to make progress.

Gillian Mackay: You should have taken Mark Ruskell's intervention!

David Green: There might be an opportunity.

I warn Government that the sense of powerlessness across communities will never lead to good outcomes. We need meaningful engagement with local communities, not for the sake of it, but because local knowledge leads to better outcomes.

Although I firmly believe that the Scottish Government has, to date, fallen far short of setting out the clear policy direction that is needed, I welcome the minister's engagement this week in addressing the concerns that Scottish Liberal Democrats have raised. She will know that we have called on the Government to produce a comprehensive, transparent and effective data centre strategy and planning framework by the end of the year, because that will be essential to giving communities, local authorities and businesses the certainty that they need. That approach will not kick the issue into the long grass—it will deal with it now. I welcome the Government's commitment to do so in its amendment, and I confirm that my party will support that amendment.

That framework should draw on international best practice and align new development with available grid capacity, set robust minimum environmental standards and protect community interests.

Patrick Harvie: Does the member acknowledge that planning guidance on its own will never be enough to enable local authorities to decide the overall level of data infrastructure that Scotland needs and that they might just continue to judge cases on a piecemeal basis?

David Green: That is why I also urge the Government to commission an independent assessment of the projected energy demand from data centres. That measure should be expected. As I said, above all, communities that host development must have ownership of clear and tangible benefits.

Craig Hoy: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

David Green: I am sorry, but I have to make progress.

Jobs, skills programmes and apprenticeships should be treated as key in that process. Better co-ordination will also be needed, which is why I urge the Government to show some leadership. Communities, local authorities and businesses need to have a data centre strategy and planning guidance that are fit for purpose. By backing a clear deadline of the end of this year, Liberal Democrats are holding the Government's feet to the fire and ensuring that communities, businesses and planning officials will get the certainty and guidance that they need. Anyone who is watching the debate should be under no illusion: our expectation is that decisions about planning should wait until national guidelines are produced at the end of this year. I hope that today's debate will give those assurances.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We move to the open debate.

15:39

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate as it has relevance to my Inverclyde constituency as well as to the Climate Action Committee, which will, I hope, sign off tomorrow on the remit of the inquiry that we have agreed to undertake into data centres. However, I am speaking in this debate as a back-bench MSP and not as convener of that committee.

The issue of data centres has affected many of my constituents. Ever since a potential data centre was proposed for Inverclyde, I have received many emails from constituents highlighting their concerns, and there are more than 1,600 submissions on the outline planning application on the Inverclyde Council planning portal. Last week, more than 250 residents attended a joint community council meeting on the single-issue discussion about the application.

I have made it public that I am taking a neutral stance on the planning application at the moment, given my role as convener of the Climate Action Committee and the inquiry that we are about to undertake. However, I cannot speak in today's debate without making some observations about the members' business debate that Graham Simpson led on this very topic only a couple of weeks ago. It was a genuinely helpful debate with contributions from members of parties across the chamber—except the Scottish Greens, who did not take part and were not in the chamber. The debate was very open and it allowed members from across the chamber to raise a lot of different points, issues and concerns, some of which have been raised again and reiterated today.

The Climate Action Committee's inquiry will be extremely important. I note again that it is the reason why I am choosing to remain neutral. Many of the issues that we have heard about today have been touched on in our discussions, and I dare say that they will come up again as we undertake the inquiry.

Artificial intelligence is becoming an increasingly important part of everyday life. It supports innovation, public services and economic growth, and anyone who uses social media platforms or engages with online banking or other online services effectively uses data centres.

Patrick Harvie: The member will have heard me say in my opening remarks that the motion for this debate is not in opposition to the technology, but in opposition to the policy vacuum. He welcomed the SNP national council's decision to call for a moratorium. Is it possible to support that decision but oppose our motion today, which says exactly the same thing?

Stuart McMillan: I will come on to that point in a moment, but the answer to Mr Harvie's direct question is yes.

As AI technology develops, demand for the data centres that provide the computing power behind those services will continue to increase, and our strong renewables sector makes Scotland attractive to the tech giants that are looking for new places to build hyperscale data centres. However, as the Economy, Tourism and Energy Committee heard yesterday, an increase in their number could result in increasing energy prices for our constituents. From an economic perspective, although our economy will stand to benefit from this emerging sector, any expansion is not without risks and challenges.

That is why I believe that the volume of applications that have been submitted across Scotland demands careful scrutiny. I therefore welcome the Scottish Government's recent planning direction requiring planning authorities to notify ministers within seven days of validation of any application for a new data centre that would exceed 50MW. That also provides the pathway to call in the application—

Q Manivannan (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Stuart McMillan: I apologise to the member. I have already taken one intervention and I have only five minutes.

I welcome the Scottish Government's amendment, and specifically the statement that

"new hyper-scale data centres in Scotland will only be approved where they have met robust environmental impact assessments, which will take account of any impact on the amenity of any neighbouring communities".

I also welcome today's announcement from the Scottish Government regarding the need for environmental impact assessments for each and every development whether it is old or new. That is extremely important, particularly in the Inverclyde context.

I recall that national guidance was asked for during Mr Simpson's members' business debate, and I note that Labour's amendment calls for that. It would be helpful if the minister, in closing, could clarify that no application will be processed before the end of the year, while the work that the minister refers to in her amendment takes place.

The issue of balancing economic and environmental demands was raised in the members' business debate and it has been raised again today.

Gillian Mackay: Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I am sorry, but I have nearly finished.

That goes further today with the mention of community wealth building ambitions and the interests of the community in the Scottish Government's amendment. Wherever applications are agreed, public benefits must be secured and the voices of affected communities must be at the heart of decision making.

I am over my time, so I will leave it there.

15:45

Laura Moodie (South Scotland) (Green): As we debate the future of hyperscale data centres in Scotland, it is worth remembering that this story began with one of our greatest scientific minds: Galloway's James Clerk Maxwell. Maxwell's work transformed our understanding of electricity, magnetism and light and laid the foundations for the digital technologies on which the modern world depends. Every artificial intelligence model that is running today owes something to his discoveries. Therefore, it is right that Scotland shows leadership in shaping the future of the technology.

The bar should be high, because Scotland's ambitions should be high. Too often in our history, Scotland has supplied the resources while others have taken the rewards. Vast wealth has been generated from Scotland's seas and mines, yet decisions about what to do with that wealth were largely taken elsewhere and too many communities were left without a lasting share of the benefits. As we enter the age of AI, we should be asking whether we are about to repeat that mistake. Will the Scottish Government lead a nation that once again supplies the resources while the great rewards flow elsewhere?

From Duns and Coldstream to Ochiltree, Hurlford, Hamilton and Annan, my constituents are frustrated by a lack of strategy and vision, and complete incoherence in the planning expectations for what are significant engineering projects. We must get the balance right. Scotland needs a strategic approach that considers cumulative impact. Our countryside is a national asset, and decisions that affect its future must be guided by long-term planning and not short-term convenience at the expense of our rural communities, productive farmlands and environments.

Craig Hoy: Does the member accept that, although many communities are concerned about AI data centres, they are also very concerned about the huge amount of renewables infrastructure that is co-located nearby? Does she back our call, and the call of many community councils across Scotland, for a moratorium on all onshore renewable technology so that we can examine issues such as cumulative impact in Dumfriesshire?

Laura Moodie: I will not back that call, for the simple reason that there is a national strategy for that. We have coherent planning guidance, a plan and proposals. It is clear that that is not at all what we are discussing today.

If we do not get the rules right from the start—as we have done with renewables—we risk having little more than a digital equivalent of the old extractive model, with Scotland providing the assets while others capture the value. Already, some of Scotland's largest landowners, including the Duke of Roxburghe and even the King, are positioning themselves at the centre of this emerging industry. In the 21st century, we should not be making public policy through private conversations between powerful men.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): The member is being a bit hypocritical. The Greens were part of the SNP Administration when national planning framework 4 was developed and adopted, and NPF4 clearly lacks the safeguards to stop the industrialisation of rural Scotland through battery energy storage, wind farms, solar and major energy structures. We cannot just pick and choose where NPF4 works. It was the Green Party

that brought in that policy, which does not have safeguards.

Laura Moodie: The national planning framework was created more than three years ago, and the world of AI data centres has developed hugely. I would appreciate shorter interventions in future.

Decisions of such scale should be guided by a clear national strategy, democratic oversight—I am giving Finlay Carson what he wants—and the interests of the communities that will live alongside the centres. That is why councils such as East Ayrshire Council are looking for leadership, clarity and guidance from the Scottish Government.

The communities that I represent are just asking for a fair deal. They want a framework through which data centre operators compete to use the least energy; innovate to heat the greatest number of homes through heat recovery systems; and vie to train the most local workers, use local suppliers and create lasting economic value. That is the kind of competition that we should encourage.

Will Scotland simply offer up our land, water and power to some of the wealthiest corporations on earth, or will we build a Scottish model in which the communities that provide those resources share directly in the rewards? We can honour the legacy of James Clerk Maxwell not by embracing the technologies that his discoveries made possible but by ensuring that the wealth that they create is shared fairly and widely.

I ask the MSPs across the chamber who have expressed to me their concerns about the proposals to listen to their constituents and the campaigners who have repeatedly come to the Parliament to voice their fears. Today, Scotland has a choice to make—one that will shape, for decades to come, its future and how its people view its Government and what it wants for the country. Do members wish to wave the saltire for a repeat of bad choices that were made under the union flag, or do they wish to act as if they were living in the early days of a better nation? As our makar said at the opening of the parliamentary session,

"don't be feart, bear the weight, do what's right."

15:50

Gary Bouse (Falkirk West) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am a serving Falkirk councillor.

When considering the issues that are presented by hyperscale data centres, I see the dual roles of being an MSP, with responsibility for representing all the people of the Falkirk West constituency, and of considering our collective responsibility to the people of Scotland and their interests as being interconnected, yet, at times, having distinctive aspects. I intend to address both in my contribution.

As the MSP for Falkirk West, I strongly oppose the application for the hyperscale green data centre, as it is called, in Larbert. The proposed development is in the wrong place. It would border a care home on two sides and is close to a nursery and local housing.

Gillian Mackay: Will the member take an intervention?

Gary Bouse: I will, when I finish this section.

In addition, Forth Valley royal hospital is in the locality.

There remain several technical questions that, to date, have not been adequately answered, including questions about conservative estimates of operational emissions and the recycling of coolant.

Most importantly, the voice of the local people must be heard. It is the wrong development for the location, and I have always asked for a formal pause—not a moratorium, as people know; I have made the argument many times. The decision from the minister on where we are going today, what she did a couple of weeks ago and the support for the Labour amendment bring me to the position of a formal pause, which I have argued for. I have even argued for it a couple of times with the minister. I am really pleased about how that has gone. I was never in favour of a moratorium—I notice that Patrick Harvie did not read out my name earlier.

Gillian Mackay: Multiple members have asserted that no decisions will be made before Christmas. There is a pre-determination hearing tonight in Larbert, and that decision is supposed to be taken by 5 October. Are the Scottish Government and the SNP willing to let down the people of Falkirk by not taking a decision quickly to issue guidance and have a formal moratorium?

Gary Bouse: I am not being pedantic, but the determination date is 4 October, although that may be extended, as Gillian Mackay knows full well. A formal pause can start literally as the ink is drying—very quickly—whereas a moratorium needs to go through a legal process, which would be a much bigger problem.

In general, I welcome what has happened today, and I welcome the minister's amendment, although I have questions about terms such as "best practice", which are not yet clear to me. I look forward to scrutinising the detail of that best practice, particularly given what has, to date, been

a bombardment of speculative planning applications from developers.

We now have AI and, like many members, I do not oppose 50MW data centres that will support industrial progress, medical advancement and wider innovation. However, controlled development must be the way forward. Given the warnings from leaders in the field about the pace of AI development, I am reassured that a safe and ethical approach is being proposed that takes seriously the potential risks that AI presents to society as a whole. That question is now being asked across Scotland and the rest of the world.

I ask the minister to outline—with the way things have been going, it should be reasonably easy—what specific interim guidance will be given to planning authorities, and to set out the effect of the Government amendment, when combined with the recent ministerial statement and the decision to support the Labour amendment, on considering applications in the short and medium-term. That covers exactly what Gillian Mackay asked about.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We are very short of time, so members will have to complete their speeches within the time allocated.

15:55

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I was struck by the comment from a Green member that we have to discuss the development of the technology. I know that the debate is about data centres, but it strikes me—and probably a lot of the public—as passing odd that we are not talking about some of the things that have been happening in the past two or three weeks in relation to AI. I am thinking about the discussion about extinction-level events and so on. It seems very odd that the Parliament has not yet, as best I know, spoken about that. I hope that, before we get to the end of the year, we will have a full discussion, in Government time or otherwise, of AI and what we can do about the potential threats.

There is no question but that artificial intelligence has the potential to transform our economy, improve public services, accelerate scientific discovery and create entirely new industries, and we should be ambitious about securing our share of the opportunities. We have a highly skilled workforce, internationally respected universities, significant renewable energy resources and a climate that is well suited to data centre operations. However, ambition must be accompanied by responsibility, and that applies both to the development of artificial intelligence and to the physical infrastructure that is required to support it.

In June, I wrote to the Minister for Public Finance to highlight reports that around 24 large-scale data centre proposals were at various stages across Scotland. It should not be assumed that, just because we differ in our views, we have not spoken to our constituents. I have spoken to many of my constituents about that point.

However, individual applications are properly considered by planning authorities. There has been a bit of a hint of contempt for planning authorities—

Q Manivannan: Will the member give way?

Keith Brown: I will develop my arguments first. If I can take an intervention later, I will do so.

Planning authorities are the legitimate place where such decisions should be taken, and we should not have contempt for that.

Of course I agree—I made this point way back in June—that it is very difficult for a planning authority to take a sensible decision without knowing the full implications if 15 or 20 AI centres were agreed to, such as the impact on our energy consumption apart from anything else. Without knowing that, they cannot take a sensible decision. No single council can determine how much data centre capacity Scotland's electricity network can sustain or how that demand should be met, or what the collective impact might be on water supplies, land use and the environment and our climate.

I therefore welcome the commitment to produce national planning and spatial guidance by the end of this year, which will set out the conditions under which data centre development should be permitted. The guidance should also ensure that proposals are subject to robust environmental assessment, including assessment of their effect on neighbouring communities. Local people should not be expected to accept unacceptable noise, disruption, pressure on local infrastructure or a loss of amenity as the price of development, and proposals should demonstrate how they will minimise the emissions associated with our energy use and avoid adversely affecting water supplies. They should contain a clear commitment to community wealth building so that the economic benefits do not flow solely to developers and multinational technology companies.

As a suggestion—it may be unworkable; I do not know—if we are paying to have renewable energy switched off at certain times because we cannot store it, why not channel that energy in, charge the multinational companies the requisite market-level price and ensure that rebates go back to people in that area for their energy use? We could ensure that the wealth that can be generated from this technology is, at the very least, shared more widely.

There are genuine opportunities to establish Scotland as a leading location for environmentally responsible data hosting, and data centres that are powered by renewable energy could support economic development while the considerable waste heat that they generate could potentially be used to heat homes, public buildings and other community facilities.

Q Manivannan: Will the member give way?

Keith Brown: I will take an intervention, if the member can be quick.

Q Manivannan: Planning permission for the South Gyle data centre was refused unanimously by the City of Edinburgh Council, but the developer appealed the decision and, given the Government's EIA requirements, the proposal is being considered again. Does Keith Brown agree that nothing in the Government's proposals will strengthen local decision making?

Keith Brown: I absolutely do not agree. The member should have listened to what I said—I talked about the various things that the Government should include in the renewed guidance to strengthen the arm of local authorities. If that does not help to strengthen their arm, I do not know what they are doing, because they should take account of the guidance.

I will use my remaining time to make a point about AI and address some of the comments that have been made in the past couple of weeks, particularly by leading figures in AI. It may be the case—this might be why we have not discussed the issue—that the Scottish Parliament and even the UK Government feel powerless to stop the headlong race involving AI going into very dangerous areas, but we should not feel powerless. We should work with the European Union and countries around the world that are willing to put in place defences against rogue AI—a coalition of the willing.

If AI agents are escaping a sandbox, doing things that they were explicitly told they should not do and then lying about it, that should raise concerns for everybody. That is probably a much bigger issue than the data centre issue, even though that is, of course, important. The issue of what AI could do to us all is extremely important, so we should discuss it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We move to closing speeches.

16:01

Rachael Hamilton: There has been consensus on the need for data centres, if I have read the room correctly, but our constituents have raised concerns covering all the issues that we have talked about. I do not need to repeat them.

I have a huge concern relating to the amendments. I have been listening to the debate, and I did not articulate myself clearly to Paul Sweeney earlier, so I will try to do so now. Hannah Mary Goodlad said that the Government will support the Labour amendment, but her amendment commits the Government to publishing planning guidance in three months, so there is a mismatch in the timelines. Does that mean that the SNP is, once again, leading us up the garden path? Will all applications be paused or chucked out within that timeframe? Will the Government come back in a few months and say that its support for the Labour amendment gives it a get-out-of-jail-free card and means that it has a further nine months to produce the guidance? Will applications then be paused or chucked out? This so-called pause sounds like a de facto moratorium, but even the Government's own planning officer has said that a moratorium could be unlawful.

We find ourselves in a very precarious position. On behalf of my Conservative colleagues, I was minded to support the SNP amendment, and I still will if the minister can say, in their closing speech, whether there is a mismatch and whether we are being led up the garden path.

I will address the Conservatives' concerns about the issue once again. The Scottish Government has offered a credible solution that would give our local government colleagues greater certainty when making difficult planning decisions. As it stands, a planning application is not planning permission. I want the Government to give an assurance that proposals will be subject to an environmental impact assessment, could be challenged by communities and will undergo a full planning process, as is right. The Government has not yet given communities reassurance that that will happen.

The Government could go further by defining a "green" data centre and by properly addressing the issue that the Greens have raised relating to the cumulative impact of the generation of energy—particularly renewable energy—especially in rural areas.

We need stronger safeguards. The Scottish Conservatives will support the Government on the issue if it can provide clarity that it will produce the guidance and that the pause is not a de facto moratorium.

16:04

Monica Lennon (Glasgow) (Lab): I have been back only three weeks, and we have had a members' debate on this issue, courtesy of Graham Simpson; a public rally outside; and now

this debate in Scottish Green Party time. I agree with others in the chamber, including Keith Brown, that we need a Government debate not just to look at the planning implications but to take a full look at the matter.

I think that there is a lot of agreement across the chamber. People do have genuine concerns, and they want a more strategic approach; more leadership; clarity on what the vision is and what Scotland wants; and detailed guidance. It is difficult for those in planning authorities to look at such applications and know what to do with them when this sort of vacuum exists.

It sounds as if we are building up to a very exciting Christmas. Everyone is talking about guidance coming in time for Christmas, so perhaps we will see the minister dressed as Santa in the chamber.

Hannah Mary Goodlad: Will the member be one of the little elves?

Monica Lennon: There are a few little elves in here today, by the sounds of it.

There are some really serious points to make. We have all been a bit freaked out by some of the media reports that we have seen, even in the past couple of days, but we are here to talk about how we deal with this issue in planning terms. On days like this, I miss my old job as a planner, because it can be very rewarding and exciting. Planners often think long term and well beyond election cycles about what the country needs and seek to strike a balance between the economy, the environment and what society needs.

I gently say to the minister that this is not day 1; my colleague Paul Sweeney was asking written questions about data centres three years ago, and I know that colleagues across the Parliament have been raising the issue during what I will call my sabbatical. [*Laughter.*] This is not day 1. I do not know whether the minister can answer this now, but if there is a decision tonight that alerts planning authorities to the possibility of guidance coming in time for Christmas, with a big Christmas bow on it, what will they do with the applications that are on their desks right now? Do they just put them in a drawer or file them away somewhere and just sit back and say, "We're not going to look at them"? Are they still obliged to actively consider those applications? Indeed, one of the minister's own colleagues asked whether there was a need to continue looking at them. There is a difference between continuing to do the work—

Graham Simpson: Will the member give way?

Monica Lennon: I will gladly take a brief intervention from Graham Simpson.

Graham Simpson: I wonder whether the member can clear up some confusion about the Labour amendment. At the end of it, it says that the Government should

"publish … guidance in full within 12 months"

and then goes on to say that

"no decisions on planning or consenting in relation to such applications should be made until this has been completed."

Does that not mean a moratorium of up to a year?

Monica Lennon: The key point is that, as the majority of Scots—and certainly those who have emailed all of us—feel, we need to have a pause to get that robust guidance. What we are saying is that we want the Government to report back to Parliament before the end of the current calendar year—again, let us say Christmas—and for that full guidance to be published within 12 months. We do not want this to roll on and on.

I will not apologise for saying that we do not have full confidence in the Government, unlike the Liberal Democrats, perhaps, and colleagues across the chamber from me. The Government will come back with guidance, and there will be no scrutiny of it. The important thing that I heard today, and which I welcome, was Stuart McMillan's comment that the Climate Action Committee was about to launch an inquiry to scrutinise data centres and to do the work that, frankly, should have been done by the Government. I think that it would be prudent of this Parliament to let the committee lead on that issue and do the work, and then we can come back and look at the guidance. Is the Government going to work on the guidance without listening to the committee?

Stuart McMillan: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Monica Lennon: I think that Stuart McMillan wants to come in. I know that he is not speaking as a convener, but I am keen to hear what he has to say.

Stuart McMillan: I thank Monica Lennon for taking the intervention. Just for absolute clarity, I should point out that the committee is looking only at the environmental impact of data centres, not at other aspects.

Monica Lennon: I thank the member for that clarification. I know that all members in the Parliament will want to engage with that inquiry, and I am sure that they will be made very welcome by the convener.

My time is coming to an end, but even from what has been said just in the past few seconds, it is very clear that there are still lots of unanswered questions. We do not know what planning authorities are meant to do between now and Christmas—perhaps they should put their feet up.

That would be very nice for our planning colleagues.

The Climate Action Committee has an inquiry coming up, and we will all want to engage with that. We also do not know what the guidance will say. Paul Sweeney was right to say that we do not know the scope of it. That is why a short pause is sensible and reasonable.

I hope that colleagues will support our amendment.

16:10

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): I agree that there has been quite a bit of agreement on many issues related to AI. However, during the past couple of debates, some confusion has erupted about what the Government is proposing. I hope that the minister will clarify that in their closing speech.

Most members recognise the opportunities that AI presents in Scotland. We know that there is an AI revolution, and it is here to stay whether we like it or not. It is transforming the way that we live, work and do business. It is providing many opportunities to improve healthcare and public services, and it is helping businesses to innovate and creating new opportunities for them.

The UK ranks third in the world for AI. Admittedly, we are way behind the US and China, but our AI industry is still bigger than those of the next five largest European countries combined. That is because we have the right talent, the right business environment and the right regulation. Scotland, with its tremendous history and its pedigree of innovation and technology, has a great opportunity to play a part in leading on that innovation. We must continue to get the framework for AI right. If Scotland and the UK are to realise the full economic benefits of AI, we must all support the infrastructure that makes progress possible.

Members also recognise that we will need data centres to be the backbone of the digital economy. David Green set that out well and fully in his speech. Simply put, if the centres do not happen here, they will still happen elsewhere in the world. We know that there is an opportunity for Scotland in data centre investment, but that opportunity needs to come with limits, standards and scrutiny—as we outlined.

Communities, councils and investors need certainty about where the developments should go, where they should not go and how many Scotland needs.

There are a lot of challenges, including the impacts on local communities, issues related to land use and, in particular, energy use. These new digital technologies are going to be incredibly energy intensive, and they will require high reliability.

There are opportunities, too. Some locations might allow us to use stranded power and therefore save on huge grid build-outs. In an electricity network where demand has been falling due to lower energy use, grid operators such as the National Energy System Operator have already taken into account some of the increases in demand that will result from new data centres, and that is welcome.

Nevertheless, there is a massive system challenge. How best to power the data centres? Where are the best locations? What should the power sources be? Can our system cope? Can intermittent generation marry up with the need for firm demand? Will there be any impact on the cost of electricity?

We should acknowledge that most of the projects will not happen until well into the 2030s, but we need guidance now. We have talked about it, and the Scottish Government must publish the guidance as a matter of urgency. I welcome the Minister for Public Finance's commitment to do so by Christmas, but, simply put, the Government must deliver on that. We must have strong guidance that gives communities reassurance, gives the planning authorities a framework and gives investors confidence that developments will happen in the right place, to the right standards and at the right time.

I hope that the minister will clarify all that in their summing up. Scotland should always be open to the right investment, but not to unmanaged development. That is the correct course of action. Our amendment gets the balance right, and I urge members to support it.

16:14

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): I thank members across the chamber for their contributions. I recognise that this will likely be the first of many debates that we have on all aspects of artificial intelligence and data during this session of Parliament. I also recognise the strength of feeling that has been expressed by members in this debate and by communities. Although this will be no consolation to those who have concerns, we are all aware that communities not just across Scotland and the UK but internationally are having similar conversations in community halls, Parliaments and other fora.

It is incumbent on us, as elected members with a duty to represent our constituents, to ensure that their views are articulated in the chamber. We also have a responsibility, given our privileged position

as 129 legislators with extensive lawmaking powers for a nation of 5.5 million people and oversight of a budget of more than £60 billion.

The reality is that we are in the early days of a parliamentary session in which it is quite possible that we will have to contend with artificial general intelligence. I do not consider it hyperbolic to say that this may be one of the most profound moments not just in recent history but in human history, as we develop technology that is cognitively equal to us, if not superior to us.

Alan Brown: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister give way?

Tom Arthur: I am going to make some progress. I hope to take an intervention later. There are points that I want to come back to.

We must recognise that this is a profound moment for all of us, and that the implications of AI, artificial general intelligence and, potentially, artificial superintelligence are of such gravity and magnitude that we will be wrestling with issues across every facet of society.

The focus today has been on planning with regard to infrastructure for data centres, which have wide-ranging applications. Their expansion has been driven by consumer demand across a range of uses and, of course, by the growth of artificial intelligence. A number of points must be considered in relation to how we respond to that.

Although we will wrestle in many other areas with how to respond to the opportunities and risks that AI presents, when it comes to spatial planning, we benefit from an established planning system with nearly eight decades of experience. I pay tribute to the professionalism and dedication of our town and country planners the length and breadth of Scotland.

Alan Brown: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister give way?

Tom Arthur: I am going to make some progress.

Considering the complexities and challenges that any major infrastructure proposal presents is what they do on a regular basis. That involves balancing a range of interests.

We recognise that the pace of progress and development in demand for compute, as manifested in data centres, will continue to evolve rapidly.

The Minister for Public Finance, in her capacity as planning minister, has set out important interventions. First, there is the requirement for notification to the Scottish ministers of all applications where the projected capacity is beyond 50MW. Secondly, there is today's announcement about the direction on environmental impact assessments. Thirdly, there is the commitment to issuing guidance by the end of the year, as set out in the Government's amendment.

Those are important steps. The practical consequence of that is that it allows and facilitates ministers to have oversight of the pipeline of applications that are coming in.

Graham Simpson: Will the member give way?

Rachael Hamilton: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Tom Arthur: I will come to a point that Rachael Hamilton raised, which was prompted by Stuart McMillan. She wanted to know what the practical effect of that is. It allows us not only to have oversight of applications as they come in, but to have an understanding of the pace with which those applications will be considered.

I can confirm that we do not anticipate any planning authority decisions being imminent before the Scottish Government guidance is in place. I reiterate that point because officials are in close contact with local government planning departments.

Graham Simpson: Will the minister give way?

Monica Lennon: Will the minister give way?

Tom Arthur: Let me make that point clear: we do not anticipate any planning authority decisions being imminent before the Scottish Government guidance is in place.

I want to turn to David Green's contribution, which I thought was excellent.

Graham Simpson: Will the minister give way?

Monica Lennon: Will the minister give way?

Tom Arthur: I am afraid that I am limited for time. I have listened patiently to every member and I am responding to what I have heard.

David Green made a very considered contribution.

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Minister, you have not taken any interventions, and you are over your five minutes, so please wind up now.

Tom Arthur: I am drawing my remarks to a conclusion, Presiding Officer.

David Green made a series of important points, and I want to thank him for his close engagement with the Government on these matters. A key point that he highlighted was about national security, data sovereignty and sovereignty of infrastructure, which are paramount.

In the light of such considerations, we do not support a moratorium on data centres—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister.

Tom Arthur: Rather, what we have set out is a proportionate process—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. You are well over your time.

I call Mark Ruskell to wind up the debate. You have four minutes.

16:20

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Perhaps the line that the Government does not support a moratorium on hyperscale AI data centres was a good one for the minister to finish on. That is the outcome of the debate. The Government is not listening to the communities that are raising concerns.

We have had good contributions from members across the chamber. Hannah Mary Goodlad spoke about the Government getting it right from the start, but the reality is that we are way beyond the start. The Government is now painfully behind. It has been overtaken by events—by the dozens of speculative applications for data centres across Scotland, in relation to which no guidance is in place.

Even today, despite the welcome clarity that Tom Arthur has just provided, there is a lack of clarity on the Government's definition of a pause, which seems to be a temporary pause before it comes up with and approves guidance, rather than a moratorium. I think that there is even a lack of clarity on what the planning minister said about the application of the guidance in relation to environmental assessment. I am currently not clear about whether every planning application for a hyperscale AI data centre will be required to have an environmental impact assessment carried out. I am not talking about the ones that will be submitted between now and Christmas time. I am talking about the ones that are already in the planning system.

Hannah Mary Goodlad: Let me be clear: the guidance that I have issued today pertains to applications that are already in the system and any new ones that come in.

Mark Ruskell: I welcome the fact that developers will have to at least look at and understand what the environmental impacts of an application would be, and that there will be a degree of transparency, but that does not affect the decision making.

I want to thank the communities that have been calling for a moratorium. Members of those communities have had to become experts and lawyers, they have had to fundraise and organise, and they have had to galvanise people in the hope that the Government will do better to protect them.

Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Finlay Carson: Will the member give way?

Mark Ruskell: No, I do not have time.

Listening to the debate, those communities will be bitterly disappointed at the lack of clarity from the SNP, the Lib Dems, the Tories and Reform, which refuse to back a moratorium and refuse to back a pause in the determination of planning applications ahead of the guidance being agreed.

I appreciate that this is a difficult issue for the many SNP members in whose constituencies applications have been made. We have heard from Gary Bouse and Stuart McMillan. We have not heard from David Torrance—I do not think that he is even here yet. I recognise that he will have to explain his position, not just to his constituents in Auchtertool but to his local branch in Kirkcaldy, which was successful in getting its call for a moratorium passed as SNP party policy.

Monica Lennon: Will the member give way?

Mark Ruskell: I need to make some progress.

A pause is hugely important. I will tell members why that is the case. There are three applications for hyperscale data centres that are likely to be determined this year, before the Government gets round to revising its guidance. Gary Bouse reminded us that the deadline for consideration of the Larbert data centre application is 4 October, and the predetermination hearing for that application is actually taking place tonight.

Stuart McMillan told us about the application for a data centre in Greenock. The deadline for submissions in relation to that planning application is today. That is the reality of what is happening in our council areas. Planning applications are progressing through councils today. An environmental impact assessment has been done for the Greenock application, but the developers thought that it was appropriate to do an environmental impact assessment relating to a mixed-use housing development. I do not understand whether that will be captured by the new guidance that the minister intends to provide.

The Presiding Officer: Will you wind up, please?

Mark Ruskell: It is quite clear that hyperscale AI data centres have lost their social licence. The call for a moratorium is an early test for the Parliament and for the Government to be clear with the public

and with the communities that are calling for action. They are calling for a pause ahead of the issuing of strategic guidance. Members will have the opportunity to vote for that at decision time tonight.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you.

I say to members that they do not have to take an intervention—it is entirely up to them if they wish to do so. However, please do not say that you are not taking an intervention because you do not have any time, as time for interventions, when they are made and responded to, is added on.

That concludes the debate on hyperscale data centres.

Middle East (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions)

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-01178, in the name of Gillian Mackay, on the middle east—boycott, divestment and sanctions.

16:25

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green): Since the grotesque violence of 7 October 2023, more than 20,000 children have been killed in Gaza and 45,000 have been injured. That seems an unimaginable number. To put it in a Scottish context, that is the equivalent of every primary school pupil in Edinburgh and Falkirk combined. That horrific figure does not even begin to capture the children who have lost their parents or their brothers and sisters. It does not include those who have been displaced or traumatised and those who remain at risk. None of it has been done in secret. It has been broadcast to the world, with some of the most senior Israeli Cabinet ministers gloating at the pain that they have inflicted. When we see horrors on the scale of those that have been inflicted on Gaza, when we see genocide, we are obliged to act.

This is a genocide that has been armed, supported and even denied by some of the most powerful Governments in the world. When two United Nations expert panels, all of the world's leading human rights organisations and the International Association of Genocide Scholars say that we have witnessed a genocide, we should take them seriously. When the International Court of Justice is investigating for genocide—the crime of all crimes—we should be listening.

Instead, the United Kingdom Government has looked the other way. The response from both Labour and Tory Governments has been truly shameful. Keir Starmer may have been a human rights lawyer, but that did not prevent him from defending Israeli forces when they threatened to cut off water and electricity. It did not prevent his Government from fighting multiple court cases in order to continue arming Israeli forces. It did not prevent it from hosting Israel's President, a man who has said that there are "no innocent civilians" in Gaza, in Downing Street. It has been one of the most appalling and immoral UK foreign policy decisions since Tony Blair lined up with George Bush to invade Iraq.

I really hope that Andy Burnham will take a different approach and that we will see his words and promises turned into robust action. The fact that the Labour Government has switched from arming a genocide to finally opposing it is

significant. It did not come easily, and it is a huge tribute to the strength of public feeling—and those I know in Scottish Labour who have been working on this—and the huge movement for solidarity with the people of Palestine. The promise to end trade with companies that profit from exploiting the occupied territories is an important step in the right direction, and it is one that we hope will be delivered in full and built upon.

Here, we do not have to wait for Westminster to do the right thing and introduce a full arms embargo. We can and must take action ourselves. A year ago, this Parliament took the historic step of voting to boycott, divest from and sanction Israel over its war crimes against the people of Palestine. Thousands of children have been killed and thousands of homes have been destroyed. Schools, hospitals and livelihoods have been turned into rubble. Horror upon horror has been inflicted upon a people who had already been forced to endure decades of violence and apartheid. The boycott, divestment and sanctions movement comes from Palestinian civil society. It is a rallying call for the world to take action. It is a simple and humane statement of solidarity, and it is the least that we can do.

Holly Bruce (Glasgow Southside) (Green): I declare my interest as a councillor on Glasgow City Council.

I believe that local councils also want to do the right thing. Right now, through its procurement of information and communications technology services, Glasgow City Council procures from Israeli surveillance companies such as Neptune Intelligence Computer Engineering—NICE systems—which provides closed-circuit television across Glasgow. Does Gillian Mackay agree that we must empower our local councils with clearer guidance and that we must urgently reform the legal basis for councils to implement ethical procurement?

Gillian Mackay: Holly Bruce's intervention gets to the heart of what we are trying to do today. I will come on to the procurement guidance in just a second.

Last year, this Parliament stepped up. Ours was the first in the world to say that enough is enough and to vote to turn the principles of BDS into action. We were the first to say that, if a company is profiting from genocide and repression, it should not be able to profit in Scotland. That was a vital precedent that we should be proud of. However, the reality is that, 12 months later, not enough has been done to implement that. We need to go further and faster. The motion is short and simple, but it could make a big difference. By making a change to the Scottish Government's procurement guidance, we can close a loophole that is allowing some companies to escape scrutiny and we can replicate the steps that the Scottish Government took against Russia and Belarus.

The Presiding Officer: Could you wind up, please?

Gillian Mackay: The Scottish Government's guidance says that the United Nations database of companies that are involved in illegal activities in the occupied Palestinian territory should be used by public bodies when they are considering companies for public contracts. The companies on that list are some of the biggest in the world, and some of their parent and subsidiary companies are being awarded contracts.

The Presiding Officer: I think that we have got the point. Thank you very much. We are well over time.

Gillian Mackay: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I believe that I should have had six minutes.

The Presiding Officer: No—my understanding is that you should have had four minutes, plus—[*Interruption*.] Sorry—it is five minutes. My apologies. You have another minute.

Gillian Mackay: Thanks, Presiding Officer.

Many of those companies on the list have been found by the UN to be involved in activities that include building and expanding illegal settlements. A procurement note that was published earlier this year says that activity in occupied territories could constitute grave professional misconduct and justify a company's exclusion from public contracts. However, we believe that that does not go far enough. Research by the Scottish Greens has identified at least one company that holds a national NHS contract whose parent company appears on the UN database. That is one of the loopholes that our motion seeks to close.

Meanwhile, councils are calling for the powers to implement boycotts but without the support or legislation that would allow them to do so. Barclays, an institution that has bankrolled Israel's war machine, has been named as a partner in the Scottish Government's own bond scheme. This afternoon, we can do the very least and move BDS on. Scotland should not be funding or supporting companies if they, their parent companies or their subsidiaries are profiting from illegal settlements. That is something the whole chamber should be able to agree on.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that a company's involvement in illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian Territories constitutes grave professional misconduct and should, as a result, automatically disqualify that company, together with any parent company or subsidiary, from eligibility for public procurement and all

forms of support from the Scottish Government.

The Presiding Officer: There are five members who have requested to speak in the debate who have not pressed their button. Members should press their button if they want to participate in the debate.

16:32

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy (Stephen Gethins): I thank the Green Party and Ms Mackay for bringing the debate to the chamber. A minority in the chamber do not think that we should be debating international affairs, but I sincerely disagree. It tells us about the kind of country that we are and it is the kind of issue that the Parliament should be debating.

It was almost exactly a year ago that the First Minister made a statement to the Parliament about the appalling situation in Gaza. We are also approaching the third anniversary of the Hamas terrorist attacks on 7 October, which Ms Mackay referenced and which the Scottish Government has consistently and unequivocally condemned. We have also consistently called for an immediate and sustained ceasefire, the unrestricted flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza and meaningful progress towards a two-state solution that guarantees security, dignity and self-determination for both Palestinians and Israelis. The conflict has cost the lives of tens of thousands and, as with appalling conflicts elsewhere, we cannot and should not stand idly by.

I take the opportunity to mark the leadership that was shown on the issue in the House of Commons by my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, Stephen Flynn. I am pleased that he will be summing up the debate, as I know that the issue is close to his heart, as it is for many in the chamber.

I reiterate my respect and support for the Jewish community. Nobody in our society should ever be subjected to antisemitism, nor should they live in fear because of who they are or what they believe. Our concerns, shared by many, about the actions of the Government of Israel and the reiteration of the need for a lasting peace do not detract in any way from our ongoing support for any community in Scotland.

Last week, we welcomed the British Government's announcement to prohibit the import of goods that have been produced in illegal Israeli settlements in Palestine. With that in mind, I will support the Labour and Liberal Democrat amendments as we work through the issues. However, I say gently to my Liberal Democrat colleague—I appreciate the way that David Green has approached it—that the Parliament was updated by the Deputy First Minister on 11 December last year. That is for the record more than anything else.

On the Greens' motion, we agree that companies that have exploited assets in illegal settlements should not profit from public contracts in Scotland.

I am a fan of the international rules-based system. The International Court of Justice has said that there is a prima facie case of genocide in Gaza, and that is why we announced a comprehensive package of economic and humanitarian measures, within the limits of our devolved powers. We have advised public bodies, including Scottish Enterprise, to take into account the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights database of companies believed to be active in the listed activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. That was last reiterated in a letter from the Minister for Business and Fair Work to public bodies in March. We set out our view that a company's involvement in the exploitation of assets in illegal settlements would likely be regarded as "grave professional misconduct", one of the grounds on which public bodies can exclude bidders from procurement exercises.

Gillian Mackay: The agreement that I believe the cabinet secretary is relying on is the World Trade Organization agreement on Government procurement. Some of the companies that we are talking about, which have subsidiaries on that list, are registered in countries other than Israel, and the WTO GPA might not apply in some of those countries. Can the cabinet secretary reflect on that and tell us whether we can exclude some of those companies?

Stephen Gethins: I thank Ms Mackay for that comment. She will understand that I wish that this Parliament had the full range of powers on the matter—I know that she does, too. We cannot interfere with the WTO agreement, but I take her point and I am happy to write to her on that.

We have stopped activities that proactively supported trade with Israel, and we have stopped offering new business grants to, and investing in, companies that are involved in the supply of military goods or services to countries where there is plausible evidence of genocide, including Israel. I am keen to hear colleagues' ideas on how we can take the matter forward, given our restricted powers. I believe in the rule of law and the international rules-based system, and I must apply that whether I like it or not.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Stephen Gethins: This is an important point, so I will continue.

Unfortunately, trade sanctions, foreign policy, export controls and economic sanctions remain reserved to the UK Government, but we will continue to act where we can. Public procurement decisions must comply with procurement law and international obligations, and grave professional misconduct is not automatically a ground for exclusion in law. Ministers cannot impose measures that exceed devolved powers or conflict with our legal duty, and we cannot lawfully exclude companies solely on the basis of the UN database. However, I am keen to work with colleagues on that and to make progress where we can. We agree with the principle that companies that have exploited assets in illegal settlements should not profit from public contracts in Scotland—something that I think Ms Mackay commented on. As I have explained, we can take action on specific companies when the full facts, not just the UN database, justify that.

Our focus remains clear: unfettered humanitarian access, accountability for breaches of international law, recognition of Palestine and a lasting political settlement based on the two-state solution. All the actions that we take must be robust, lawful and capable of withstanding challenge. The horrors that are taking place in the middle east are tragically also seen in conflicts across the world, as I have experienced myself in Ukraine, including in Sudan, where there is the worst humanitarian crisis on earth. The International Criminal Court—an organisation that I wholeheartedly support—has 13 situations under investigation in countries across the world, and we must ensure that there is consistency in our approach internationally and uphold the law, be it domestic or international.

I thank the Greens for lodging the motion. I am determined that Scotland will continue to speak out for international law, human rights and the protection of civilian life.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. Could you please move your amendment?

Stephen Gethins: I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer.

I move amendment S7M-01178.5, to insert at end:

"recognises, however, that any such decisions must be taken in accordance with the current legal framework, noting that trade sanctions, foreign policy, export controls and economic sanctions remain reserved to the UK Government; urges the Scottish Government to continue to engage with the UK Government on the recently announced package of measures, including sanctions; reiterates its call on the UK Government to place an immediate ban on licenced arms exports from the UK to Israel; reaffirms its support for humanitarian access as well as lasting peace through a two-state solution, and also reaffirms its commitment to the international rules-based system and international humanitarian law."

The Presiding Officer: I call Neil Bibby to speak to and move amendment S7M-01178.3. You have four minutes.

16:39

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate on the motion lodged by Gillian Mackay.

It is important that we have this debate. Thousands of people continue to die in Palestine. It would be wrong for us to ignore the situation there, which amounts to a moral emergency.

As I have said previously, the attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023 was an attack not only on Israel but on humanity. The vengeance that Netanyahu meted out to the people of Gaza in subsequent years was similarly an act directed towards all of humanity. An atrocity met with genocide is not proportionate and it is not justice.

There is increasing evidence that war crimes appear to have been committed, and we are witnessing unprecedented violence, including settler terrorism and ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, perpetrated by settler terrorists.

However, it would also be wrong if we did not discuss the actions we believe the Scottish Government should take that would be effective, justified and lawful in bringing about a lasting peace, as well as those of the UK Government. We might disagree on the best course of action, but doing nothing is not an option, because warm words are cold comfort without action. The amendment in my name makes it clear that we want both the Scottish and UK Governments to consider the actions that they can take to stand up for what is right. We need to do so effectively, along with our international partners such as France.

Each Government has different powers and responsibilities, and we need to separate out reserved and devolved responsibilities in relation to this issue. The focus today is on whether, and how, we can use Scottish procurement law to bring about a lasting peace. For the aforementioned reasons, we will support the motion in the name of Gillian Mackay.

The two-state solution cannot be just a hope or a dream; it must be made a reality if we are to have peace. We cannot be spectators when we see so many atrocities, so much violence and such genocide. We cannot be commentators and wring our hands—we need to act. It is for those reasons that we support the actions being progressed by Ed Miliband, the Foreign Secretary, that recognise that Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory is unlawful, in line with the finding of the International Court of Justice. Those actions

include banning the trading of goods from illegal Israeli settlements; banning the advertising and promotion of land and property in illegal settlements; strengthening the UK's existing global human rights sanctions regime to go after those who defy international humanitarian law in Palestine and around the world; sanctioning extremist settlers who have supported or incited acts of violence against Palestinian communities; and reimposing major economic sanctions on Iran and bearing down on its network of proxy groups, including Hezbollah.

Stephen Gethins: Will the member give way?

Neil Bibby: I am sorry, but I do not wish interventions to take up the limited time that I have.

Some have doubted whether the sanctions will work. We will see in time whether those points are well made. Some will also understandably say that they have been a long time coming. If the actions being progressed need to be developed or extended, the UK Government should do that, and the Scottish Government should also do what it can. This is not a full stop. Things will perhaps need to be adjusted. However, what will not change is our stance and our belief in the two-state solution.

Justice is blind. It does not consider colour, race or faith. The actions that the Foreign Secretary has taken on the illegally occupied West Bank settlements are just, regardless of people's colour, race or faith. To argue for justice for the Palestinian people, denied to them for decades, is not to argue against justice for Israel. To argue for justice for the Palestinian people is not to argue against the interests of Israel. It is to argue for peace.

I move amendment S7M-01178.3, to insert at end:

"notes the actions being progressed by the UK Government in relation to illegal settlements, including an import ban on settlement goods, sanctions against individuals, an advertising ban and arms export restrictions, and calls on the Scottish and UK governments to consider what further actions they can take to secure a lasting peace between the two states of Israel and Palestine and to uphold international law."

The Presiding Officer: I call Russell Findlay to speak to and to move amendment S7M-01178.4.

16:43

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Earlier today I was on a building site in North Lanarkshire. With Scotland currently in the grip of a housing emergency, while I was on the site I heard about the broken planning system, the huge cost of new net zero regulations and how uncertainty about local council reform risks making house building even harder than it already is. The people building those much-needed new homes, and the people moving into them, would rather that the Scottish Parliament focused on issues relevant to them and their families. They do not want Holyrood talking about things that are happening thousands of miles away—but here we are.

This is the Scottish Parliament at its worst—left-wing politicians using it to parade their supposedly progressive credentials and indulging in their favourite subject: the hatred of Israel. I wondered whether our party should even take part in this debate. However, I decided that, on behalf of Scotland's valued Jewish community, it was important for us to do so. For far too long, they have had their safety compromised by a pervasive and growing anti-Israel movement. That movement holds Scotland's Jews responsible for the actions of a foreign Government in Israel.

I will concede that not all the useful idiot flag wavers on Scotland's streets are antisemitic, but antisemitism fuels this movement, whose people's belief in the destruction of the state of Israel is explicit—just listen to their poisonous chants about the river to the sea.

On Saturday, I spent time with the Glasgow friends of Israel group—

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP) *rose—*

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Russell Findlay: I will take Kate Nevens's intervention.

Kate Nevens: Emili Stevenson, a British Jewish woman, was interviewed on Sky News recently and said that, if anything, refusing to align British Jews with the actions of a violent ethno-nationalist Government in the middle east makes us safer. The conflation of antisemitism with criticism of the Israeli Government is making Jewish populations in the UK and around the world less safe. Jewish populations should not be held to account for the actions of the Israeli Government.

Russell Findlay: The grass-roots organisation, Glasgow friends of Israel, supports the right of the state of Israel to democratic self-determination and works hard to counter antisemitism while advocating for peace. Let me tell Ms Nevens what its members told me: that Jewish families in Scotland feel afraid and unsafe—indeed, Scotland's only Jewish school in my area requires security measures that you will not find at any other school.

Last year, John Swinney foolishly and wrongly accused Israel of committing genocide and raised

the Palestinian flag above the Scottish Government's headquarters—

Fulton MacGregor: Will the member take an intervention?

Russell Findlay: Yes.

Fulton MacGregor: Does the member agree with the president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the former Prime Minister of Israel, who said that

"sanctions … against Jewish terrorists"

are

"not against the legitimacy of the state of Israel"

and that there is no basis to the Israeli Government's response that the decision to impose sanctions against Jewish terrorists is an expression of antisemitism?

Russell Findlay: No, I do not, but what that illustrates is that Israel, as a democracy with freedom of speech, allows for a range of opinions, which you will not find in the countries that want to destroy Israel.

At the time of John Swinney's flag-raising escapade, Timothy Lovat of the Jewish Council of Scotland described the First Minister's position as

"undermining the safety, security and wellbeing of the Jewish community in Scotland."

Two days ago, Campaign Against Antisemitism released a documentary about flourishing Jew hate in the NHS, with four in 10 Jewish patients saying they felt they must hide their religious identity when receiving treatment; and worshippers at synagogues and people at Jewish medical charities have already come under attack. Often, those attacks are linked to Iran, which has slaughtered tens of thousands of its own people.

The Iranian regime does not respect human rights: women are arrested, beaten, raped and killed there for not covering their faces; Iran exports terrorism around the world through its proxies Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis; and, on 7 October 2023, Hamas invaded Israel and slaughtered an estimated 1,200 people in cold blood, gang-raped women and took 251 hostages, including children and British nationals.

MI5 has just issued a fresh warning that Iran is plotting violence on our streets. According to MI5, we are in greater danger now than we were after 9/11. For four years, the terrorism threat level in the UK was classed as substantial; a few months ago, it was raised to severe, meaning that an attack is likely.

Untold numbers of lives in this country have been saved thanks to Israel. Israel is a trusted and important intelligence partner, but that is being put in jeopardy because left-wing politicians from Labour, the Scottish National Party and the Greens keep stoking anti-Israel sentiment. Just as John Swinney's posturing last year was, Andy Burnham's new sanctions are not only performative but dangerous and make the people of our country less safe. He is harming our national interest and increasing the terrorist threat to court Islamist and far-left votes.

We recognise that illegal settlements and settler violence undermine the prospects for peace, but we should distinguish clearly between action against unlawful settlement activity and the indiscriminate exclusion of Israeli-linked companies. We also believe that blanket boycotts will not advance a two-state solution that gives security to Israelis and Palestinians.

I want this Parliament to devote its time to addressing the huge range of problems that Scotland faces, and that is what my party will do. I also want Scotland's Jewish community to know that we stand proudly with them and stand defiantly against our common enemies.

I move amendment S7M-01178.4, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"condemns the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, in which approximately 1,200 people were murdered, and 251 people were taken hostage, including children and British nationals; notes several reports, including findings by the United Nations, that rape and sexualised torture were committed during the attacks and against women and children held hostage in captivity; recognises Israel as a democratic state and a longstanding ally of the UK, and acknowledges the importance of UK-Israel intelligence sharing in tackling shared threats and protecting citizens; recognises Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas and Hezbollah, both of which are terrorist organisations proscribed in the UK and receive support from Iran; notes that foreign policy is reserved matter to the UK Parliament; recognises that Israeli settlements and settler violence undermine the prospects for peace; considers, however, that blanket boycotts will not advance a two-state solution and risk deepening community tensions in the UK, and supports a two-state solution that guarantees security for Israelis and Palestinians."

16:50

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): I begin by warmly welcoming the debate and thanking Gillian Mackay for bringing it to the chamber. The Greens have kept me in here all afternoon for two debates, so I thank them. I confirm to Gillian Mackay and to other members that we support the principle of Gillian Mackay's motion, because it underpins a really important principle, which is that public money should never be used to sustain illegality, forced displacement or violence.

Let us all be clear that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law. They violate Palestinian rights—

human rights—and chip away at the foundations not only of a viable Palestinian state but of a just and lasting peace, with, and I hope that Russell Findlay listens to this, Palestinians and Israelis being treated as equals.

Before my election, I was proud to work for the international development charity Christian Aid. My former colleague Katie Roxburgh is Christian Aid's programme manager for Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. She has recently returned from the West Bank. Despite having visited several times, she reports that what she saw on that visit shocked her to her core. She said:

"I am even more fearful that, with the world's attention on the war in Iran and the escalating situation across the wider region, the situation facing Palestinians will reach new depths."

Katie describes new illegal settlements and outposts, extensive construction and bulldozing, and escalating attacks by armed settlers. She recounts farming families being driven from their land, losing their homes and livelihoods. She says that entire villages "simply no longer exist".

In one village near Jericho, Katie witnessed settlers dumping a truckload of rotten dates beside a Palestinian family, which attracted swarms of flies. The settlers subjected that family to noise throughout the night, flew drones overhead and drove their livestock on to the family's pastures. Weeks later, the family's home was demolished. This is not an abstract dispute over lines on a map; it is the systematic erosion of people's safety, dignity, homes and livelihoods. As Katie warns,

"the West Bank is disappearing before our eyes".

Let us be clear that the international community cannot continue to condemn those actions with words while sustaining them through trade and public investment. The UK Government's announcement last week, which I note in the Labour amendment, of a ban on imports of goods from the West Bank is therefore welcome, albeit long overdue. The Liberal Democrats have called for action for years. However, a ban on goods is only half the job.

I note that the Government's amendment references

"trade sanctions, foreign policy, export controls and economic sanctions"—

the lot. Yes, the Scottish Government must press the UK Government for stronger action. That should include a comprehensive ban on arms exports to Israel, including F-35 components, and wider sanctions on individuals and entities linked to settler violence. I also say gently to the minister that, while recognising where powers are reserved, we must not fall short when it comes to using the powers that Scotland has.

Our amendment asks public bodies to ensure that their human rights due diligence is up to date, rigorous and capable of—

Stephen Gethins: Will the member give way?

David Green: I will give way.

Stephen Gethins: I thank the member for his speech. I recognise his expertise in this area. I think that we must do everything that we can within the powers that we have. I lodged my amendment because the UK Government agreed to the measures last week, and I am keen that officials work with it constructively. Does he agree that we must work within that legal framework but that we must also push the UK Government to go further where we think that that is appropriate?

David Green: I recognise that we need to work within the legal framework and that the decision was made only last week and so is very recent. However, I hope that the Government can commit this evening to bringing a statement to Parliament or an opportunity to debate the issue in future. Despite what we hear from members on the other side of the chamber, it is fundamentally important that we stand up for who we are and for human rights, no matter where in the world we are talking about.

Returning to our amendment, the need is clear. Amnesty International's analysis of Scottish Enterprise's previous due diligence found unclear objectives, confused methodology and weak alignment. The Parliament has already pointed to the work that is needed. In February 2025, members called on Scottish Enterprise to review its human rights due diligence. In June of that year, the Government confirmed that a review was to take place. Our amendment simply asks Scottish Enterprise to update Parliament on its work, as called for by Oxfam, Quakers in Scotland and others.

You are looking at me, Presiding Officer, so I will close. Scottish Liberal Democrats strongly believe that a two-state solution remains the only credible route to peace, dignity and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Defending that dream demands more than words; it demands consequences for those who seek to profit from or enable the illegal settlements. I therefore hope that parties from across the chamber can unite behind those principles this evening.

I move amendment S7M-01178.1, to insert at end:

"; further believes that public bodies should ensure that all due diligence processes are up to date so that no companies with links to human rights abuses are provided with public funding; recalls that Parliament passed motion S6M-16571 on 26 February 2025, calling on Scottish Enterprise to review its human rights due diligence checks; notes that, since confirming in a GIQ on 25 June 2025 that

the review had taken place and that, steps would be taken to implement its findings during 2025-26, no further information has been published, and calls, therefore, on Scottish Enterprise, to update Parliament on progress and whether any new human rights due diligence process has been created as a result of this review."

16:56

Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform): I begin by saying that I, and Reform UK, want peace in the middle east. We want people from Israel and Palestine to be able to live securely and freely, without terrorism, violence and armed groups pursuing endless conflict. However, we must not forget that the terrorist organisation Hamas, which executed a murderous pogrom on 7 October 2023, is not willing to engage in the peace process with Israel, which is the only democracy in the middle east and a country that recognises legal gay marriage and has gender recognition.

The motion is not a serious contribution to achieving peace; it is merely an attempt to turn Scottish public procurement into a weapon, and the Scottish Greens know that. Making this a debate about procurement is simply a Trojan horse for the far left's obsession with Israel, and the Greens' mask will slip.

The motion proposes that a company that is involved in "illegal Israeli settlements"—although we would dispute that—should automatically be excluded, along with any parent companies and subsidiaries, from Scottish Government procurement and support. Let us put aside for a moment the wider and highly contested political arguments surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict and focus on that misguided proposal. Procurement should be based on quality, value and the conduct of the supplier, and not on a biased policy that is inspired by left-wing hatred for Israel.

Gillian Mackay: Will the member take an intervention?

Senga Beresford: No, thank you.

Why does the motion demand an automatic ban? What happens when a multinational has thousands of subsidiaries around the world; when the parent company has no involvement whatsoever in the activity in question; or when the alleged connection is historical, indirect, disputed or commercially remote? What happens when excluding a company means that Scottish taxpayers receive worse value for money, fewer bidders and less competition? The job of members in this chamber is to legislate for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

Those are not abstract questions; they are precisely the questions that responsible procurement policy must answer, and the questions that the Scottish people will want answered. If the Parliament establishes the principle that political disagreement with a foreign Government is sufficient reason to blacklist companies from public contracts, I wonder where that principle will end. Do we apply it consistently to every country whose Government we disapprove of? Do we include companies operating in China, Saudi Arabia and Turkey? I know that the Scottish Greens have spoken about their dislike for Trump, so do we blacklist all United States-related companies, too? Alternatively, will the Parliament create one procurement standard for Israel and another for everyone else?

The motion is ridiculous and is inspired simply by a hatred for Israel rather than by a genuine aim to create sound and positive policy. It should therefore be rejected.

The Presiding Officer: We move to speeches from members in the chamber who are not either opening or closing.

17:00

Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP): I am grateful to Gillian Mackay for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I will focus on the motion, because I think that we have been looking beyond that. The motion that is before us focuses on

"illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian Territories"

and, rightly, asks us to consider how Scotland's public procurement and support mechanisms should respond to the clear breaches of international humanitarian law.

The SNP has a long and consistent record of support for Palestinian rights, for a just and lasting peace that is based on a two-state solution, and for the principles of international humanitarian law. The Scottish Government has also placed on record its anger and disgust at the Hamas attack on 7 October.

I will touch on the point that Stephen Gethins made about support for our Jewish community in Scotland. I have met the Jewish community in the Parliament on a number of occasions; I attended the synagogue civic service just a month ago or so in Edinburgh; and I will continue to engage with the Jewish community in Scotland and recognise the issues that it has.

However, let us be clear: settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law. We need a two-state solution. The strategic placing of settlements by the Israeli Government undermines that, deliberately. That is not a matter of political opinion but the settled

position of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice and successive Scottish Governments.

Involvement in such settlements cannot be treated as ordinary commercial activity. Where there is credible evidence of such involvement, it is right that public bodies treat it with the seriousness that it deserves. Scotland has taken significant steps, as the minister said. We previously backed a package of boycott, divestment and sanction measures that were targeted at the state of Israel and companies that were complicit in its military operations and occupation. It is an illegal occupation; I reiterate that point.

The Scottish Government has, rightly, moved to end public funding and support for arms companies that are linked to the conflict in Gaza. It has restricted the use of publicly owned infrastructure. As the minister said, it has repeatedly called on the UK Government to take far stronger action, including meaningful sanctions and an end to exports of arms that risk being used in violation of international law. Those are not empty words. They reflect a genuine determination that Scotland should not be complicit in injustice.

At the same time, we operate within the reality of devolution. Foreign policy, international sanctions and many aspects of trade and company law remain reserved. I wish that that was not the case but, unfortunately, it is.

Procurement decisions must also comply with existing legal frameworks, including those that are designed to ensure fairness, value for money and due process. Automatic disqualification is a powerful tool, but it must be robust, based on evidence and legally sustainable. Using as a clear reference point the United Nations database of companies that are linked to settlement activity is a sensible and practical starting point. There was some disagreement about that from Gillian Mackay. Where companies, their parents or subsidiaries are involved in activity that constitutes grave professional misconduct that is linked to illegal settlements, they should not benefit from Scottish public contracts or support. The Parliament has already endorsed that principle in spirit, and the Scottish Government can work to put it into practice within the powers that are available to us here and now. However, we must be honest about the limits of what Holyrood can achieve alone. Real leverage over the broader conflict lies with the UK Government and the international community.

Scotland's voice is strongest when we speak with moral clarity and consistency: condemning the suffering in Gaza, demanding unrestricted humanitarian access, calling for the release of all hostages and insisting on accountability for violations of international law, on all sides. That is, from both sides: the terrorist side—Hamas was mentioned—and the Israeli Government.

We can and should continue to use every lever that we have—procurement policy, public investment decisions and diplomatic pressure—to uphold those values. The people of Scotland expect their Parliament to stand for human rights and international law as a bare minimum, and that is what we are doing. They expect us to ensure that public money is not used in ways that undermine those principles. The Government's amendment sharpens the focus on illegal settlements and the companies that are involved in them. I welcome that focus.

The Scottish Government has already committed to the broader direction of travel. What matters now is continued practical progress, as the minister outlined; careful implementation that stands up to legal scrutiny; and sustained pressure on reserved matters where the real power still rests at Westminster. I will support measures that close genuine gaps and strengthen Scotland's contribution to upholding international law, while recognising the constraints under which we operate.

Solidarity with the Palestinian people, respect for international law, and a determination that Scotland plays no part in enabling illegality—those remain the guiding principles for those on this side of the chamber. Let us continue that work with clarity, consistency and purpose.

17:05

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): Earlier this year, in April, 14-year-old Aws al-Naasan was shot dead by a settler outside his school gates in al-Mughayyir. In July, around 30 Israeli settlers attacked the town of Tal and opened fire on residents. This month, in Arraba, the al-Fari family's olive grove has been razed—bulldozed to the ground by the Israeli military.

Those examples are not isolated incidents, but a pattern of intensifying state-sponsored violence in the West Bank. They form part of a deliberate campaign by the Israeli Government to dismantle Palestinian society and displace its people. As Ed Miliband has rightly said, that is "ethnic cleansing" in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Muntasir from the West Bank says:

"what is happening right now is … erasure of humans, trees and stones, and anything that is Palestinian, by settlers under the support of the military."

When I spent time in Palestine, it was not just the violence that shocked me, but the normalisation of the occupation. It was the ways in

which I could see and feel how violent military control and illegal settlement expansion were being embedded into the daily lives of people in the West Bank. It is both the violence and that normalisation in which our Governments are currently complicit.

We need to make sure that the Scottish Government is taking every step possible to ensure that Scottish funds are not supporting companies involved in any of Israel's human rights abuses or violations of international law. While some matters may be reserved to the UK Government, there is still a lot that the Scottish Government can and should be doing. Unlike the UK Government, we must recognise that it is impossible to disentangle the economic activity in the settlements from the rest of Israel and bring in a comprehensive boycott in Scotland

Part of that is ensuring that we have clear and transparent processes for decision making. I am really disappointed that Scottish Enterprise has still not published its revised human rights due diligence policy or explained how the safeguards are being applied in practice, and I very much support David Green's amendment on that subject.

We also need to look close to home, in Parliament. Why are we using HP and Microsoft—two companies that are well known to be the main providers of technology to the Israeli authorities?

Why are we using Barclaycard for MSP credit cards, when Barclays holds billions—

Holly Bruce: Will the member give way?

Kate Nevens: I will.

Holly Bruce: The First Minister has said that

"in the face of genocide there can be no business as usual."—[*Official Report*, 3 September 2025; c 27.]

However, as Kate Nevens rightly pointed out, we are seeing continued partnership with Barclays, which is a primary dealer of Israeli Government bonds and provides £1.5 billion in credit—

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me—this is not a speech within a speech; it is an intervention on your colleague. Please intervene on your colleague.

Holly Bruce: On the Barclays point, does Kate Nevens agree that the First Minister has to stand by his word? We must see a stringent human rights due diligence process that does not allow complicit companies such as Barclays to benefit from Scottish money?

Kate Nevens: I very much agree with Holly Bruce—thank you, Holly. Barclays holds billions in shares, loans and underwriting for defence companies that supply the Israel military.

We also need to look closely enough at where our parliamentary pensions are invested, which security software we are using and what products we are selling in the canteen.

I remain really proud that we were the first nation in the world to commit to a package of boycotts, divestments and sanctions on Israel. We know that it is the right thing to do, and that it is part of our nation's wider commitment to global human rights and justice, and a feminist approach to our international affairs.

We also know that boycotts, divestments and sanctions work. As we have seen in South Africa, where the apartheid regime was isolated—

The Presiding Officer: Can you wind up, please.

Kate Nevens: —and ultimately brought down. Now we must act on that and start implementing the boycott across all of Scotland's public procurement and funding.

17:09

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Today's debate is about how the Scottish Government uses public money, the conduct of companies that seek Scottish public contracts and support and the position that Scotland takes on the occupation of Palestinian territory. The motion states that a business's

"involvement in illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian Territories"

is

"grave professional misconduct",

and that companies that are involved in that activity should be excluded from Scottish public procurement and from support provided by the Scottish Government. That principle has my full support.

The Scottish Government accepts that it has a responsibility to act within the powers that are available to it. Last September, the Government introduced a pause in new awards of public money to defence companies whose products or services are provided to countries where there is plausible evidence of genocide, and that measure remains in place.

The same principle applies to companies that are involved in illegal settlements as part of the wider occupation of Palestinian territory. A company that chooses to become involved in settlement activity is making a commercial decision, which must have consequences. Put simply, one of the consequences should be that the company is not eligible for Scottish public money.

More and more countries are coming to their senses and announcing sanctions on the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Ireland, our neighbour, is one nation that has recently taken action in that regard. In July, President Catherine Connolly—who, incidentally, I hope to meet in my constituency tomorrow—signed into law the Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill. The legislation prohibits the importation of goods from Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. Canada, France, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden are just some of the other countries that have recently announced similar measures.

Some of the amendments acknowledge that, ultimately, trade sanctions, foreign policy, export controls and economic sanctions are reserved to the UK Government. The UK Government has now concluded that Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory is unlawful, and it has announced plans to ban imports from illegal Israeli settlements and create new powers to sanction individuals and companies that support, facilitate or profit from settlement activity. That is long overdue.

The expansion of settlements has been taking place for decades, and the international community has ample evidence of the consequences. The UK Government acknowledges that settlement expansion threatens the prospects of a two-state solution. I welcome the change, and I hope that the UK Government moves quickly, following its announcement, to implementation.

As I said in an intervention on Russell Findlay, it is important to note that the sanctions were welcomed by the president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, a former Israeli Prime Minister, an ex-head of the Israeli army and several former ministers and diplomats. In a joint statement, they said that sanctions are being imposed

"against Jewish terrorists, and not against the legitimacy of the state of Israel … There is no basis to the"—

Israeli—

"government's response that the decision to impose sanctions against Jewish terrorists is an expression of antisemitism."

Although the UK Government's measures are welcome, I must acknowledge that, yesterday, more than 130 legal experts, including 18 KCs, wrote to Andy Burnham saying that the sanctions on Israeli settlements "fall far short" of Britain's obligations under the International Court of Justice's finding that the occupation is unlawful. The Prime Minister must reflect on that.

Scotland has said that it stands with the people of Palestine. The Scottish Government has called for a sustained ceasefire in Gaza and an end to licensed arms exports to Israel. It also has a track record of providing humanitarian aid and assistance to Gaza and the West Bank. In July, we announced a further £0.5 million, on top of our previous contribution of £600,000, for the occupied Palestinian territory humanitarian fund. As one of the first Governments to call for a ceasefire, the SNP Government is clear that the international community must use all its energy to persuade and put pressure on Israel to end the violence, including through sanctions and trade restrictions.

To bring the issue closer to home, I note that the Scottish Government should know who it is doing business with. It should know what businesses are involved in and, if they are clearly involved in illegal settlement activity, that involvement should result in consequences for their eligibility for public contracts and Government support. While we talk in this chamber and in chambers around the world, women and children in Gaza continue to die every day. Just today, there are reports that 21 people, including eight children, have died as a result of a war-damaged building collapsing. The fact that the onslaught continues without any real consequences is a stain on all our humanity, which we will all need to live with for generations. A two-state solution must be found. Every country and every democracy has a role in applying pressure to allow that to happen.

17:14

Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Scotland has long been a supporter of those facing the worst of oppression and violence across the globe. In living memory, our largest city became the first city in the world to grant Nelson Mandela freedom of the city while he was still imprisoned for campaigning against apartheid in South Africa. Moreover, in 1975—when the Scottish Parliament did not yet exist—Strathclyde Regional Council banned goods from apartheid South Africa.

That sort of action from our political structures reflects something core to the people who call Scotland their home. We can see that in the action that was taken by the workers at the Rolls-Royce factory in East Kilbride in 1973. Upon discovering that they were working on engines that would be used by Pinochet's junta, which had overthrown the Government in Chile, they decided to strike, and in the process grounded much of the Chilean air force on the other side of the world.

The people of Scotland have been at the forefront of raising our voices against the absolutely horrific scenes that we have seen in Gaza and the West Bank. The Scottish

Government has taken action, pausing new awards of public money to defence companies with links to the Israeli Defense Forces. Unfortunately, we are not yet an independent nation, which means that arms licences and exports are a reserved matter, but I am glad that the Scottish Government is continuing to press the UK Government to end those exports as a matter of urgency.

As the national secretary for the Scottish National Party, I had the privilege of helping to facilitate the opportunity for the Palestinian ambassador, Dr Husam Zomlot, to speak at my party's annual conference in 2025. His speech will stay with me for many years. Its raw emotion, showing the real impact that support from people living across our nation had made to those facing unimaginable horrors, was enough to nail any cynicism about the power that our words can have.

Dr Zomlot talked about how, under John Swinney's leadership, we were among the first to call for a ceasefire in Gaza; among the first to demand sanctions on the illegal settlements in the occupied territories; and among the first to call for the inalienable right to statehood and self-determination of the Palestinian people to be respected. Thanks to the pressure placed on Westminster by Scotland, Dr Zomlot was able to address our conference as the ambassador of the state of Palestine, following the recognition of the state of Palestine in the face of extreme opposition across Westminster.

The argument, thankfully, has continued to move on, and I welcome the moves by the UK Government to ban the import of goods from illegal settlements. Like the Kerr clan motto, it is late, but in earnest.

It is important to consider the SNP amendment in that context. That is why I will be supporting the amendment lodged by my colleague Stephen Gethins. We are not yet an independent nation with full control of the sorts of powers that are enjoyed by perfectly normal countries the world over. With any luck, that will not remain the case for much longer, but the amendment recognises the reality and puts the call for action where action must be taken. Although we remain shackled to Westminster, we are not powerless. As we have seen time and again, when things seem most hopeless, our words have power beyond what we believe.

I think that it is right to end my speech with the ambassador's own reflection of what the voices in Scotland meant to his people. He said:

"When the genocide raged in Gaza, you raised your voices to carry our pain. You brought our students to study here, our wounded to heal here. And you reminded us again and again that we were never alone, that our struggle was also yours. And that is the struggle for freedom that all people and all nations cherish. My friends, this is Scotland. This is a nation of lions, roaring lions, a people of conscience and a moral force for good. It is that—it is that why we love Scotland."

The people of Scotland—our people—expect us to act as a nation of lions today.

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

17:18

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Gillian Mackay for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I agree with the cabinet secretary that it is absolutely right that we discuss international affairs. After all, they affect us, and it is why the Scotland Act 1998 was written in the way that it was.

I point out that Kit Malthouse, the Conservative MP for North West Hampshire, has been one of the most vocal critics of Israel's actions, saying that British foreign policy implies that Palestinian lives matter less than anyone else's. Therefore, far from being a cause that is left wing in nature, it is actually widespread, given the number of people who see this injustice for what it is.

I believe that justice for Palestinian people is the moral question of our time, and there are millions of Scots who believe that, too. This is the longest and most brutal occupation in history. It is, in international law, an illegal occupation; indeed, that is not contested—except by Israel, obviously.

In 1993, the Palestine Liberation Organization accepted the existence of Israel and accepted that a Palestinian homeland would be formed on 22 per cent of former Palestinian land. We can understand why the Palestinians would say that there could be no further concessions on land to form a second viable state, but that could not be further away.

There is systematic violence, the displacement of families, the forced demolition of houses, economic restrictions, strangulation deliberately blocking Palestinian produce from leaving the country and political detention to lock up young men in underground Israeli prisons without trial while their families do not know where they are. Children are shot in the street—it happened last week on the West Bank—and the rule of law is not applied.

There are viewing platforms on the Gaza border where Israelis are invited to witness the ongoing genocide in Gaza. In Gaza, 95 per cent of children expect to die, because there have been 223,000 tonnes of explosives and ammunition deployed in the past three years.

I want to be on the right side of history, and I know that many people in the chamber do. I do not

want to be a bystander; I want to do what I can. The merciless bombing of innocent children and hospitals is humanity's darkest moment.

Pope Francis broke with diplomatic tradition and denounced Israeli policies in Palestinian territories. He said that the conflict was one of the great failures of humanity and he stated that the arrogance of the occupiers undermined the dialogue.

The levels of violence in the West Bank are unprecedented and are primarily driven by a surge in large-scale Israeli military operations. In 2026 alone, 3,500 families have been driven from their homes due to settler violence, and more than half of them have included children. Soldiers are free to do whatever they want. They have killed and they have maimed. Palestinians get no justice, and there do not seem to be any consequences.

Israel is emboldened by the fact that the world does very little to stop it. There is some resistance from European countries such as Spain, Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK and France, as well as from Canada, but their purpose is not to provide Israel with the impunity that it has been used to.

I condemn all violence, and I am on record condemning the atrocities of 7 October. I want to see peace in the Middle East. I have campaigned for it for 30 years, but we know that there will not be peace for Israelis or Palestinians unless there is a viable Palestinian state.

There are those in Israel who truly care about their country. A good friend of mine, Dr Alon Liel, who was a former adviser to Ariel Sharon and other prime ministers, has been demonstrating in the streets of Tel Aviv about Israeli policies and for Palestinians. He told me that what offends him most is that the Israel that he fought for, and the Israel that he wants to serve, is not the Israel that he is living in right now, and he says that it is not helping the state of Israel that it is allowed to behave like this. The world must act, and Britain has a great deal of responsibility.

The Scottish Government has been criticised by Amnesty International for not being transparent enough about the actions that it can take on public procurement, so I want the cabinet secretary to set that out in his closing speech. Scotland has devolved powers, so it can act, but we have not seen enough evidence of that in the Government's data.

In his closing speech, will the cabinet secretary be transparent and clear about what action he has taken since a similar motion was last lodged in Parliament, so that Scotland can do its part and ensure that we have actually done something and not been only bystanders?

17:23

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): Since my election in May, I have witnessed some extraordinary wastes of time in the chamber. There have been pointless debates, nodding dogs and no big ideas, but I will give the Greens credit where credit is due—this has to be the biggest waste of time so far, and that says a lot. They are wasting our time with a ridiculous debate that is cover for their anti-Israel hate. It is as simple as that.

The Greens could have used their time to talk about the horrific programme for international student assessment results last week, the housing emergency, local government restructuring or mass migration. Heck, they could have been really controversial for the Scottish Greens and had a debate on the environment. But nope—they have said nothing on those issues. Instead, before us is a clickbait motion that has been created to grab headlines and social media hits. It is extremist far-left political posturing and will spread fear and alarm across Scotland's Jewish communities. Shame on the Greens.

Let me be clear from the beginning that I am pro-Israel. That means that I support Israel's right to exist as a sovereign state, I support the right of Israeli citizens to live safely and I believe that Israel has a legitimate right to defend itself against terrorism and attacks, such as the terrorist action that was carried out by Hamas on 7 October 2023.

However, being pro-Israel does not mean that I believe that the Israeli Government is always right. I can support Israel while disagreeing with particular decisions made by its Government—those positions are not contradictory. In fact, I would argue that supporting a country should never mean blindly supporting every Government that happens to lead it.

Members might therefore ask why I oppose the motion. I do not believe that isolating Israel is the right answer. Israel is not simply a Government; it is a country of millions of ordinary people. When we call for broad boycotts and economic isolation, we are not only putting pressure on politicians—

Gillian Mackay: Will the member give way?

Thomas Kerr: No, I am not interested. We have heard enough from the far left, thanks.

We are affecting universities, businesses, workers and ordinary citizens.

Alex Kerr: What about an intervention from the centre left?

Thomas Kerr: I will pass.

I question whether punishing ordinary Israelis will bring peace closer.

Israel is also a democracy with a diverse population and a political system in which Governments can be challenged, protested against and replaced, which we may see in just a month's time. Israelis regularly disagree fiercely with their Governments. A blanket approach towards Israel risks turning a complicated political conflict into a simple story in which one side is entirely guilty and the other is entirely innocent.

The reality is much more complicated. Israel has faced repeated wars, terrorist attacks and threats to its existence throughout its history. Israeli civilians have been targeted by organisations that explicitly reject Israel's existence. That security concern cannot simply be dismissed. Imagine telling any other country that it must simply accept attacks against its civilian population and give up its right to defend itself. We would not expect that in Britain, France, Ukraine or any other sovereign state. Israel should not be held to a completely different standard.

Peace cannot mean security for one population at the expense of another. Israelis have a right to security, so we can criticise Governments, but we should not dehumanise an entire population. If we genuinely want peace, we should be looking for ways to encourage co-operation rather than permanently entrenching hostility.

Yes, I am pro-Israel. I believe that Israel has a right to exist. I believe that Israeli citizens have a right to live without terrorism. I reject the idea that Israel should be uniquely singled out for isolation. I will continue to defend Israel's fundamental right to exist, to protect its citizens and to determine its own future. I will always stand with Scotland's resilient Jewish community. I will let the extremists on the other side of the chamber continue to pander to the most nasty, antisemitic sentiments in society.

17:27

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 7 October 2023, I was asked to attend a committee room in the House of Commons to watch footage of what had unfolded at a music festival, in houses, in parks and in communities in Israel. I saw footage of quite traumatic things happening to civilians through absolutely no fault of their own. It is something that I have not been able to shake from my mind since that day.

However, the horror, the terror and the suffering that I watched on that screen that day should not have been followed by ever more horror, terror and suffering inflicted on the Palestinian people. That is why, on 16 October 2023, the first occasion on which the House of Commons sat subsequent to those appalling terrorist attacks, I recited the famous Burns quote about man's inhumanity to man and the countless thousands who mourn. I said to the then Prime Minister that history would judge us on how we chose to respond.

Within a single week, I stood across from that Prime Minister and told him that the Israeli Government's decision to withdraw water, aid and energy from civilians was collective punishment of the Palestinian people, and that we must be clear in our opposition to it. The Prime Minister told me that Israel had the right to defend itself. Immediately, he was on the wrong side of history, but, of course, he was not alone. Over the months that followed, numerous members of the House of Commons were on the wrong side of history, in denying the reality of collective punishment, denying the need for a ceasefire and denying that a genocide was taking place, as some of them do up to this very day.

I am proud that I am a member of a political party that chose to stand on the right side of history, to stand up for—

Russell Findlay: Will the minister take an intervention?

Stephen Flynn: I have listened to more than enough Tories on this issue, ones with far greater status than Mr Findlay will ever have, so I would encourage him to sit down and to perhaps listen to my comments in this regard.

Russell Findlay: Coward.

Stephen Flynn: The only cowards are the individuals who take to the air to bomb civilians—men, women and children. Maybe Mr Findlay should reflect on those very points.

Just as I am privileged to be part of a party that has stood on the right side of history, I am now proud to be part of a Government that has used every lever at its disposal to stand up against the inhumanity that is being perpetrated by the current Israeli Government, both in Gaza and in the West Bank. It is for that reason that we agree entirely with the motion that has been put forward by the Green Party. However, we cannot escape the legal realities of our situation and the issue of where responsibilities sit within the United Kingdom. That is exactly why we have put forward our amendment.

However, cross-party consensus is important, and I can give a firm commitment to members in other parties that we will continue to work with them to do more in the best interests of the people of the middle east and of the people of Scotland, who care so deeply about this issue.

I am very conscious of time, but I made a commitment to Pauline McNeill to address the

issue in relation to Scottish Enterprise. With your forbearance, Presiding Officer, I will do that briefly.

The Presiding Officer: Very briefly.

Stephen Flynn: It is important for the Parliament to hear loud and clear that every measure that the First Minister set out has been acted on. Just in the past week or so, I met Amnesty International and Scottish Enterprise to put forward my clear views to Scottish Enterprise in respect of the publication of the human rights due diligence work. I expect and hope that it will act on that. I cannot instruct it to do so, but I expect it to respond to that.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. You are well over your time.

I call Maggie Chapman to wind up the debate.

17:33

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I was 13 when Chris Hani was assassinated outside his home in Boksburg. At the time, we—my mum, my dad, my sister and I—were in South Africa, visiting family. I remember that the mood of our trip changed. The adults were more on edge and they held us closer when we were out and about. There was talk of an eruption of violence. Violence was nothing new for many South Africans. Black South Africans were accustomed to violence—violence by individuals and violence by the state.

I knew that South Africa was segregated. I knew that some people had privileges that others did not—not that I saw much of that as a child. Our parents worked hard to protect us, and we did not spend much time in segregated places. My favourite place was Pumula, a little fishing village on the KwaZulu-Natal south coast, where there were no rules about who could and who could not swim in the sea. So, I did not often think about segregation or why it existed.

Chris Hani's assassination changed that. Looking back, I see that that April moment was part of my political awakening. It forced me to understand the systems around me. Apartheid was not simply something that happened to South Africans. It was a system of oppression and the abuse of political power that was deliberately maintained through laws, institutions, state violence and economic power. It was also a system that was challenged by resistance from within South Africa and by solidarity from people across the world.

That solidarity mattered. The global boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against apartheid helped to isolate the regime economically, culturally, academically and politically. Students campaigned. Workers organised. Artists refused to perform. South African sports teams were shunned, much to my dad's consternation. Consumers refused to buy South African goods. Universities divested.

Governments eventually acted, too. In 1986, the United States Congress overrode President Reagan's veto of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, imposing significant economic sanctions on the apartheid Government. Those sanctions helped to bring about reforms and to facilitate the transition to non-racialised democracy.

None of that happened in isolation. Sanctions did not defeat apartheid on their own. The liberation struggle belongs first and foremost to South Africans. However, international solidarity helped to change the political and economic cost of maintaining apartheid. That is why I believe so strongly in BDS today.

I have been to the West Bank. I have seen with my own eyes the reality that Palestinians live with: infrastructure that privileges Israeli occupiers, checkpoints controlling Palestinian movement, walls, barriers, surveillance, soldiers determining who can pass and when, who can grow what crops where, who can go to school, and who will face beatings or bullets. I have seen how often different systems of rights and freedoms operate in the same land, and I recognise that architecture.

I grew up in the shadow of apartheid. I know exactly what it means when discrimination is not simply an individual prejudice but something that is embedded in infrastructure, law and power. I know, too, what international solidarity can mean.

Palestinians are not asking us to save them; they are asking us to stop enabling their oppression. The Scottish Green motion is modest. It says that companies involved in Israeli settlements should not receive public contracts or public support. If a company profits from, facilitates or sustains an illegal and brutal system of occupation, dispossession, violence and genocide, why should Scottish taxpayers subsidise it?

We have a choice. We can look away, we can say, "It's complicated," we can say that someone else should act first, or we can remember what solidarity meant to those of us who grew up under apartheid. The global BDS movement told South Africans fighting for liberation: you are not alone. Today, we must tell Palestinians the same.

Our actions matter. They can matter as peaceful, democratic tools of solidarity, making injustice impossible to ignore and liberation possible to achieve. Support the motion.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the middle east—boycott, divestment and sanctions.

It has just been pointed out to me that someone is in breach of this. I should remind members that they are not to wear anything in the chamber that is considered a prop, or overtly political, or campaigning in nature. Please desist in future—or that individual will not be allowed to participate in the debate.

Business Motion

17:38

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S7M-01187, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 22 September 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by General Questions

followed by First Minister's Questions (Backbench Members)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scotland's Right to Decide

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 23 September 2026

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Climate Action and Rural Affairs; Education, Culture and Gaelic

followed by Ministerial Statement: Addressing Drug Harms

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Building a Flood Resilient Scotland: Delivering Action for Communities in a Changing Climate

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 24 September 2026

1.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.30 pm General Questions

2.00 pm First Minister's Questions (Party Leaders)

followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Growing Scotland's Creative Economy

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Tuesday 29 September 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by General Questions

followed by First Minister's Questions (Backbench Members)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 30 September 2026

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Justice and Housing; Economy, Tourism and Transport

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 1 October 2026

1.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.30 pm General Questions

2.00 pm First Minister's Questions (Party Leaders)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 21 September 2026, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.

(c) that, for the purposes of Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions on Thursday 24 September 2026, that Rule 13.9.3 be varied to replace the words "of up to 15 minutes" with "of up to 20 minutes".—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:39

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I call Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S7M-01188 and S7M-01189, on the designation of lead committees, and motion S7M-01190, on the office of the clerk.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy, Tourism and Energy Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the supplementary legislative consent memorandum relating to the Cyber Security and Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill.

That the Parliament agrees that the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Commonwealth Citizens) Bill at Stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that between 1 February 2027 and 31 January 2028, the Office of the Clerk will be open on all days except: Saturdays and Sundays, 26 March, 29 March, 3 May, 28 May, 31 May, 10 September, 26 November, 24 December (pm), 27 and 28 December and 3 and 4 January 2028.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

17:38

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business. If the amendment in the name of Hannah Mary Goodlad is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Graham Simpson will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S7M-01177.5, in the name of Hannah Mary Goodlad, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01177, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on hyperscale data centres, 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.

17:39

Meeting suspended.

17:40

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S7M-01177.5, in the name of Hannah Mary Goodlad, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01177, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on hyperscale data centres. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Against

Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)

Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Lorna Slater]
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Abstentions

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01177.5 is: For 72, Against 32, Abstentions 16.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01177.3, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01177, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on hyperscale data centres, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Lorna Slater]
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01177.3, in the name of Daniel Johnson, is: For 94, Against 26, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S7M-01177, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on hyperscale data centres, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform (Ivan McKee): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not get connected to the app. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote has been recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Abstentions

Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Lorna Slater]
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S7M-01177, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on hyperscale data centres, as amended, is: For 80, Against 26, Abstentions 15.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes new hyper-scale data centres in Scotland will only be approved where they have met robust environmental impact assessments, which will take account of any impact on the amenity of any neighbouring communities; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to the swift creation of national planning and spatial guidance by the end of the year for the determination of conditions, under which data centre development should be permitted; believes that, in order to gain planning approval, any proposals for data centres should demonstrate how they would minimise emissions for their energy usage and not impact on water usage and how community wealth benefit will be built in to the business case; notes that best practice for the creation of data centres includes steps to support decarbonisation and to recycle waste heat for wider community use; recognises the increased utilisation of AI and further development of such technology; calls for strong domestic regulation of and international collaboration on the development and use of AI systems to ensure its safe and ethical use, and to address the scale and seriousness of potential threats the use of AI may pose now and in the future; believes that Scotland has great strengths in data science and energy, and as such, a clear industrial strategy is required to maximise the economic benefits of AI data centre developments, including jobs and wages; calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward a clear definition of what constitutes a hyperscale data centre and to issue national planning guidance, alongside robust environmental standards and assessments, to inform national and local decision-making on current and potential hyperscale data centre planning applications; notes that such guidance must provide clarity on spatial, community and social impacts of any such developments and that decisions must be based on community consent; agrees that consideration must be given to implementing community benefit schemes and adjusting the non-domestic rates regime or other tax measures to ensure that economic benefits are accrued by communities in which such data centres are sited; calls on the Scottish Government to report back to Parliament on the development of national planning guidance by the end of the current calendar year and to publish this guidance in full within 12 months, and believes that no decisions on planning or consenting in relation to such applications should be made until this has been completed.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01178.5, in the name of

Stephen Gethins, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01178, in the name of Gillian Mackay, on the middle east—boycott, divestment and sanctions, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Against

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Lorna Slater]
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)

Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01178.5, in the name of Stephen Gethins, is—[*Interruption*.] With that late change, the result of the division on amendment S7M-01178.5, in the name of Stephen Gethins, is: For 64, Against 56, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01178.3, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S73-01178, in the name of Gillian Mackay, on the middle east—boycott, divestment and sanctions, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)

Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Abstentions

Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Lorna Slater]
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01178.5, in the name of Neil Bibby, is: For 80, Against 25, Abstentions 15.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01178.4, in the name of Russell Findlay, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01178, in the name of Gillian Mackay, on the middle east—boycott, divestment and sanctions, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Lorna Slater]
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Abstentions

Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01178.5, in the name of Russell Findlay, is: For 25, Against 85, Abstentions 10.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01178.1, in the name of David Green, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01178, in the name of Gillian Mackay, on the middle east—boycott, divestment and sanctions, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)

McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Lorna Slater]
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01178.1, in the name of David Green, is: For 95, Against 25, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S7M-01178, in the name of Gillian Mackay, on the middle east—boycott, divestment and sanctions, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Against

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Abstentions

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Lorna Slater]
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S7M-01178, in the name of Gillian Mackay, on the middle east—boycott, divestment and sanctions, as amended, is: For 63, Against 25, Abstentions 31.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that a company's involvement in illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian Territories constitutes grave professional misconduct and should, as a result, automatically disqualify that company, together with any parent company or subsidiary, from eligibility for public procurement and all forms of support from the Scottish Government; recognises, however, that any such decisions must be taken in accordance with the current legal framework, noting that trade sanctions, foreign policy, export controls and economic sanctions remain reserved to the UK Government; urges the Scottish Government to continue to engage with the UK Government on the recently announced package of measures, including sanctions; reiterates its call on the UK Government to place an immediate ban on licenced arms exports from the UK to Israel; reaffirms its support for humanitarian access as well as lasting peace through a two-state solution; also reaffirms its commitment to the international rules-based system and international humanitarian law; notes the actions being progressed by the UK Government in relation to illegal settlements, including an import ban on settlement goods, sanctions against individuals, an advertising ban and arms export restrictions; calls on the Scottish and UK governments to consider what further actions they can take to secure a lasting peace between the two states of Israel and Palestine and to uphold international law; further believes that public bodies should ensure that all due diligence processes are up to date so that no companies with links to human rights abuses are provided with public funding; recalls that Parliament passed motion S6M-16571 on 26 February 2025, calling on Scottish Enterprise to review its human rights due diligence checks; notes that, since confirming in a GIQ on 25 June 2025 that the review had taken place and that, steps would be taken to implement its findings during 2025-26, no further information has been published, and calls, therefore, on Scottish Enterprise, to update Parliament on progress and whether any new human rights due diligence process has been created as a result of this review.

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

There are no objections. That is good.

The question is, that motions S7M-01188 and S7M-01189, on designation of a lead committee, and motion S7M-01190, on the office of the clerk, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy, Tourism and Energy Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the supplementary legislative consent memorandum relating to the Cyber Security and Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill.

That the Parliament agrees that the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Commonwealth Citizens) Bill at Stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that between 1 February 2027 and 31 January 2028, the Office of the Clerk will be open on all days except: Saturdays and Sundays, 26 March, 29 March, 3 May, 28 May, 31 May, 10 September, 26 November, 24 December (pm), 27 and 28 December and 3 and 4 January 2028.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. I ask members who are not staying for members' business to please leave the chamber quietly.

Scotland's Rainforest

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S7M-00319, in the name of Jenni Minto, on Scotland's rainforest. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of Scotland's rainforest and associated natural habitats; understands that under all climate warming scenarios over the coming century, Scotland will increase its global share of the temperate rainforest biome, making it the best place on the planet to regenerate this habitat; notes that Argyll and Bute hosts approximately 50% of what remains in Scotland, and therefore holds a central role in this regeneration; recognises the significant role of the Alliance For Scotland's Rainforest in promoting the importance of Scotland's rainforest as well as the need to protect and expand it; welcomes the recent discovery of a number of rare species, including glow-worms and slime moulds, in Scotland's rainforest; recognises the immense work of the Argyll Countryside Trust (ACT) following the launch of the West Cowal Rainforest Habitat Regeneration - Biological Recording project in June 2024, which has now identified 1,109 species across the project area, and commends the team at ACT and all of the volunteers who have contributed to this project.

17:54

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Almost exactly five years ago, during the 26th conference of the parties—COP26—I travelled to Cormonachan community woodlands near Lochgoilhead, in Argyll and Bute. I was there to attend the blessing of Scotland's Celtic rainforest by five indigenous leaders from the Amazonian rainforest. The community event that followed blended our Gaelic ceilidh tradition with songs from the Amazon, intertwining like the worts and lichens, or the passion flowers and orchids, of our respective rainforests. That was a special event, and it was a true illustration of how peoples from around the world can come together for nature and climate action.

I thank all my fellow MSPs who signed my motion and those who are speaking in the debate. We are here to promote the importance of Scotland's rainforest and the need to protect and expand it.

On Friday, I joined local Argyll groups and stakeholders in Kilmorich woods to plan collaboration to achieve the vision of a joined-up Celtic rainforest along the west coast of Scotland. As the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest says,

"Scotland's rainforest is one of our most precious habitats. It is as important as tropical rainforest, but even rarer. Yet few people in Scotland know it exists and fewer still know how globally significant it is."

When I am asked what the rainforest is, I say that

it is like an enchanted woodland, with native trees such as oak and rowan linked with ferns, worts and lichens, home to beasties and birds. It is a place of calm and a place of life. It is a place that we need to grow.

The April 2019 report on "The state of Scotland's rainforest" noted that

"With just over 30,000 hectares remaining, there is very little rainforest left in Scotland."

However, with the creation of the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest and the Scottish Government rainforest restoration fund, and with passionate communities, things are beginning to improve.

As NatureScot stated in its "Evaluation of Scotland's Rainforest Fund", which was published in June this year,

"A key strength of the fund was its enabling role",

which

"allowed projects to build the skills, evidence and relationships needed to continue beyond the funding period, rather than focusing only on immediate outputs."

The evaluation noted that the fund made an impact in a wide range of areas, including in places and habitats, reducing key pressures on rainforest habitats and improving understanding of site conditions and priorities; on people, supporting training, skills development and employment, which is particularly important in rural areas such as Argyll and Bute; and on organisations, strengthening organisational capacity and confidence.

On Friday, we heard about the practical measures that communities have been taking, but we also heard about where there are obstacles, for example with deer management. Community deer larders are great, but planning laws are interpreted differently in different areas. There is a need to build trust and work with people to improve understanding. Rhododendron ponticum may be beautiful in bloom, but it creates a hostile environment for rainforest. Drones are used to map it, drill and fill or lever in mulch to remove it, but that is time consuming. One proposal that we heard on Friday was for it to be banned in garden centres.

We heard from grass-roots organisations that understand their woodlands and how those connect with the whole ecosystem of the area. The Action West Loch alliance for west Loch Tarbert has been working with Forestry and Land Scotland, Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust and the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforests to ensure that commercial felling recognises the importance of the rainforest and of native oysters in the sea loch. As was said on Friday, trees, freshwater, salt water and people are all connected.

We also cannot forget the real engine room of rainforest function that lies in its insect diversity, which the Holy Loch Nature Reserve is currently mapping.

Amanda Bland (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): The member mentioned high levels of deer grazing and the invasive non-native species, Rhododendron ponticum. There are also exotic conifer plantations that are, as the member said, preventing sustainable regeneration of our Scottish rainforest. What does the member advise the Scottish Government to provide in respect of clear guidance, policy support and funding to tackle those issues for the restoration and expansion of Scotland's rainforest?

Jenni Minto: I thank Amanda Bland for her intervention, and she is right to point out all the areas that can impact on the rainforest in Scotland. That is why, as members will hear later on, one of my pleas to the Government is to ensure that funding is still there.

Scotland's rainforests are rare, precious and globally important. That gives us not only a responsibility, but an incredible opportunity. As nature champion for the Scottish rainforest, I will use my privileged position to ask three things of the Scottish Government. The first is simple. Will the Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands come to Argyll and visit one of the amazing groups to see for himself the wonders and importance of our Celtic rainforest? There are many to choose from.

The second ask is to ensure that funding is multi-year. Rainforest restoration work is seasonal and does not always fit into a restricted timescale, so cliff-edge funding is not helpful. In addition, as Amanda Bland noted, there are many other areas around the specifics of simply growing trees—if that is ever simple—to support the rainforest.

The third ask is to recognise how rainforest restoration is a perfect opportunity to put community wealth building into action. Jobs and skills are created; tourism is supported; people's health and wellbeing is improved; and, importantly, Scotland's nature and biodiversity is increased.

I end with a short poem written by Scotland's fourth makar, Kathleen Jamie, after she explored the Celtic rainforest in Mull:

"We make a green place, like a stage, ready in a theatre
With an air of calm expectancy of something yet to arrive
Or something just gone
Emerald breath fronds where spore drifts invisible
Our friends the hospitable oaks,
Our friends the stone, live alone

No more
We speak silences with greenish tongues
Enter a beetle
Enter a breath of wind
Enter a party of siskins
Enter a frog."

Our rainforest has survived against the odds; now we need to help it thrive. Let us reconnect it, restore it and grow it.

18:01

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague, Jenni Minto, on securing the debate. I am proud to support the motion on Scotland's rainforest, which shines a crucial spotlight on one of Scotland's most magnificent, and yet underappreciated, natural treasures: our temperate rainforests.

When people think of rainforests, their minds naturally wander to the tropical rainforests of the Amazon basin, the Congo or south-east Asia. That is not surprising, because, although tropical rainforests, which are one of our planet's major biomes, account for about 6 per cent of the earth's total land mass, temperate rainforests are one of the rarest biomes, found only in one quarter of 1 per cent of the planet's surface. Despite that global rarity, however, we are the custodians of a significant area of temperate rainforest right here in Scotland—indeed, we have the largest amount of Atlantic rainforest in Europe.

Wrapped in ocean mists, with high rainfall and mild temperatures that create a unique climate, these ancient woodlands of oak, birch, hazel, ash and rowan are draped in rich green velvet carpets of mosses and extraordinary lichens. Our Celtic rainforest is a living, breathing ecosystem of international significance, providing a home to hundreds of species that are found nowhere else in Europe. However, despite its European importance, our rainforest is often taken for granted. As with many other things, we often fail to appreciate the wonder of our local environment. For generations, these habitats were fragmented, overgrazed and neglected, and that is why the motion is important. It asks for Parliament not only to look with reverence at what remains, but to look forward, with ambition, purpose and commitment, to restoring our temperate rainforest.

Our efforts will be important not only nationally, but globally. Climate change is real and global warming will have a devastating impact on the world's temperate rainforests. Temperate rainforests can exist only in cool climates, and in a warming world, they will face extreme pressure.

However, in Scotland, we will face something a little different. Scientific analysis demonstrates that, under all climate-warming scenarios, Scotland will, over the coming century, increase its global share of temperate rainforests. While temperate rainforests in other parts of the world face catastrophic shrinkage as a result of rising temperatures and droughts, Scotland's geographic and climate position means that the climate will remain suitable.

The major impact of climate change in Scotland will be to increase rainfall. Although dealing with increased flooding risk will be a major undertaking in much of Scotland, including in my constituency, the increased rainfall will offer hope for our temperate rainforest. That makes Scotland literally the best place on the planet to protect, restore and regenerate this global endangered habitat. In fact, it places a profound historic responsibility on our shoulders. We are not only merely managing local woodland; we are custodians of a globally critical ecological lifeboat. If we act now, Scotland can lead the world in ecological restoration, showing how biomes can be revitalised to combat biodiversity loss and build climate resilience.

To turn that global responsibility into practical action, we must look to where the heart of Scotland's rainforest beats strongest. Argyll and Bute has half of Scotland's temperate rainforest. From the coastal glens of Lorne and Kintyre to the sheltered woodlands of Cowal, Argyll and Bute is the epicentre of this habitat. It holds an indispensable central role in our national regeneration strategy. If Scotland is to meet its biodiversity and woodland targets, the landscape scale recovery of our rainforest must be driven through Argyll and Bute.

That task cannot be accomplished by Government policy alone. It requires genuine collaboration, shared vision and grassroots passion across the public, private and voluntary sectors. With that in mind, I welcome the motion's recognition of the outstanding contributions of Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest. I was also glad to see the motion recognise the work of the Argyll Countryside Trust. As the motion states, in June 2024, it set out a map of biological richness of Cowal.

Temperate rainforest is a priceless ecological treasure. As our global share of that biome increases over the coming century, let the Parliament resolve to make Scotland a beacon of restoration of our rainforests.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Jamie Langan to be followed by Ariane Burgess. You have up to forty—up to four minutes.

18:06

Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform): I was going to say, Deputy Presiding Officer—I think that I have a good four minutes in the tank, but if I

were to speak for 40 minutes? Some members might want to get home at that point.

I start by thanking the member for Argyll and Bute both for her motion and for bringing this debate to the chamber. I agree that Scotland's rainforest on the west coast, primarily in her constituency, is a truly beautiful and unique part of the world. Shamefully, I must say that I have not visited in a number of years; I will need to get that in the calendar.

All members are likely to claim that their constituency or region is the prettiest. When I have the privilege of spending time in the southern uplands, the Cheviot Hills or the Tweed Valley, I would certainly make that case for South Scotland. However, we can all agree across the chamber that we have the privilege of living in the most uniquely beautiful country in the world, and the west coast's magnificent forests play a unique part in defining the rural landscape that defines Scotland.

Conservation of our natural and rural environment, such as the pristine forests that we have talked about, is deeply important. Challenges such as the fragmentation of our native woodland and dealing with invasive species such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and, more commonly known, rhododendron, require active management from the communities that interact with our rural and natural environment.

The cause of conservation is one that, rightly, enjoys support right across the chamber. Indeed, looking to my own benches, what could be more conservative than conservation of our natural inheritance? It is important, however, for us to separate the genuine and important cause of conservationism and its associated efforts from the sirens' call of rewilding. Many of the efforts of so-called rewilding aim to treat rural Scotland as a static environment that has been the same since time immemorial. It works on the assumption that Scotland's rural environment can return to an arbitrary point in time, a year zero perhaps, without consideration of the mixed and important land use that our rural environment holds.

I am reminded of the ever-sage words of the late Sir Roger Scruton, who commented that:

"The countryside is not a slice of untilled nature. It is a human institution built over centuries in the image of the people who made it."

It is important to recognise that Scotland's beautiful rural environment is one in which people live and work. Farmers, foresters, gamekeepers, rural businesses and many more all play their part in that.

Jenni Minto: On the point about community, does Mr Langan agree on the importance of community wealth building in communities on the west coast in order to ensure that people remain living and working there, and also to ensure that visitors are welcome?

Jamie Langan: I fully agree. Community defines our fantastic rural identity in this country. I will touch on that later in my contribution, but I thank Ms Minto for her intervention.

It is the people who work and live in rural Scotland who shape its identity, and that is nowhere more apparent than within my own region of South Scotland, where the rural beauty of the land has been shaped by the people who have lived and worked in it for generations.

The motion also touches on what climate change we will likely see in the coming decades. With that in mind, it is important to recognise the role that Scotland's land will play in a changing world and to have honest and frank conversations about the fact that it cannot do all things for all people. Because of the changes that we are likely to see in coming decades, including the increasingly apparent strains on the global food supply, our own national larder should be front and centre of Scotland's land use. Putting food on the plates of Scots is a matter of national strategic resilience.

Regardless of our exact priorities for Scotland's rural and natural environment, there is an area that everyone in the chamber should be able to agree on, which Ms Minto touched on: the important work to conserve and preserve important environments such as Scotland's rainforest and other areas across the country. That requires the buy-in and support of the communities that call those places home and interact with them daily and must not be a case of urban Scotland pontificating or projecting its wishes upon those places.

Organisations such as the Argyll Countryside Trust, as mentioned in the motion, provide an excellent example of that work. The motion rightly raises awareness of Scotland's rainforests, an extraordinary and irreplaceable environment that helps to shape the natural character of our beautiful and unique rural landscapes. We all can, and should, support the work to tackle invasive species, support continued biodiversity and ensure that future generations of Scots can enjoy that magnificent environment for many years to come.

However, when we consider rural Scotland, our ambition should not be to return to an imagined moment before it was shaped by the centuries of Scots who have lived and worked there. Instead, we should hand on a countryside that is richer in nature and is economically and culturally alive to the future generations in the towns, villages and

communities that have shaped and sustained it to date.

18:11

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I warmly thank my colleague Jenni Minto for bringing this really important debate and for invoking memories of that fantastic ceremony and celebration at Cormonachan woods during COP26.

We are in a global biodiversity crisis. We heard that in January this year from the United Kingdom Government, which published a somewhat redacted national security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security. That report pointed to the fact that, by 2030, our food security could be seriously hampered.

That is the global situation, but we need to bring it home to consider biodiversity in Scotland. We are 28th from the bottom of the list of 240 countries in the biodiversity intactness index. Although Scotland has an ambitious biodiversity policy, with the aim of being nature-positive by 2030 and fully restored by 2045, we are currently falling short. I look forward to the Climate Action Committee hearing more about why that is the case. The policy contains more than 100 priority actions, 16 of which have been formally delayed while action on another 33 has not yet started and Scotland's Futures Forum says that there is insufficient pace for us actually to become nature positive by 2030.

It was 2021 when I first learned about Scotland's incredible temperate rainforest. Although I had never heard of it, I realised at that point that I had grown up experiencing that incredible magical woodland on the Argyll coast. When I learned about that, the organisations that were embracing the rainforest were saying that they needed something equivalent to the peatland restoration fund so that they could really take on the work of restoring the rainforest. At that point, they were talking about having a £500 million fund and were certain that they could inspire enough people to create a matching fund: in other words, if the Government could come up with £250 million, they could get match funding to take that forward on the same level as the work on peatland restoration.

That really would help us to become nature positive. I believe that rainforest restoration, along with the work on peatlands, would be a great step forward. So, although I really welcome the rainforest fund that Jenni Minto spoke about, and although a lot has been done with that £1.7 million, it is a tiny drop in the ocean compared to what the more than 40 organisations in the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest really need to take the work forward. It is not just them—many other individuals and organisations are doing that work.

Rainforest restoration is an incredible project. In fact, it is precious—I am going to use that word again. This fragmented rainforest, and its potential for us to tackle nature depletion, are very precious. What I love so much about the project is that it is really all about people and nature working together. It is an incredibly positive story of collaboration.

Jenni Minto mentioned some of the challenges. As she has gone into the rhododendron issue in detail, I will not take that any further, but one of the other challenges that she mentioned, on which I do want to go into detail, is deer. One of the incredible things that has come out of the work between the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest and deer managers is the Common Ground Forum, which has transformed a completely polarised landscape by bringing people together to talk about the issues and to try to remove the misinformation that has been going around. Stalkers, for example, thought that they were going to be out of a job, because the land was going to be rewilded. That was not the case. I have attended several of the forum's events—one in a cold barn with 80 stalkers, who talked movingly about their work and their passion for it—and because of it, we now have a much better situation in Scotland. Indeed, I believe that it really helped us with the deer management legislation that was introduced last year. There is certainly something that we can learn from the alliance about bringing people together.

I want to close by echoing Jenni Minto's calls to the minister. I ask him to visit not only Argyll, but many of the other remnants of the rainforest all the way up Scotland's western seaboard. The project absolutely needs multiyear funding; it cannot just stop and start, and the people involved need certainty to continue their work. We need to recognise the power of the rainforest to help us meet our climate and biodiversity targets, and it really needs to be adequately funded.

18:17

Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): I thank Jenni Minto for bringing this debate to the chamber, and let me be clear: I am fully supportive of her motion.

The rainforest designation is a great tool for drawing lots of interest to the topic of native woodlands. The fact that we have rainforest in Scotland is something that not many people will consider, but I would just point out that in the summer, I visited in my South Scotland region Leadburn community woodland south of Penicuik and Carrifran wildwood near Moffat, with the support of the Woodland Trust, Borders Forest

Trust and D&G Woodlands. Those organisations are enlightened on the issues facing our native species and the benefits that communities can reap when we embrace the philosophy of proper woodland management. They are thinking about how we can lead in peatland restoration, for example, and they realise that a properly managed native wood can, in fact, be a barrier to wildfires, due to the damp and moist nature of the ground.

I am conscious that commercial forestry is one of Scotland's main industries, but it does not have to be at loggerheads with local communities if woodland management is done right. However, I do not believe that we have found that balance yet. Our native species are still being muscled out by Sitka spruce, which covers over 72 per cent of Galloway forest park, and too often I hear about rights of way being denied and lack of proper consultation with residents when new plantations are green lit. They are a big and visible scar on the landscape in some of our most rural areas, and we do not discuss the issue in the way that we do with, say, wind turbines or, indeed, data centres, as we have done today. I think that that furthers the need for organisations such as the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforests, and I really commend that innovation and whoever was the brainchild of it.

However, that brings me to my main point, which is a straightforward one. The rainforest area that we are discussing exists only from Argyll northwards. I understand that there are criteria for specifying woodland as rainforest, mainly a hyperoceanic climate and proximity to water, and it could be argued that areas in Dumfries and Galloway fall into that category. Given that there are designated fragments of rainforest south of that, in Cumbria and the north of England, it seems strange that the south-west of Scotland has been left out of the conversation at this stage.

Indeed, the south of Scotland has woodlands of equal importance, but they do not carry the all-important rainforest label. That is simply because the project that we are talking about has been stimulated in, and is driven from, Argyll. For example, Carstramon wood, near Gatehouse of Fleet, is, by many measures, an exceptional native woodland, but it would not be classed as rainforest due to being outside key rainforest-focused areas. Carstramon wood will carry on being a great native woodland—as a child, I spent a lot of time in it with my granny, who used to live near there—but it will not necessarily be called a rainforest.

I plead for us to change that, because, if the label is helping to drive funding and interest elsewhere, it is worth asking whether the map is drawn in the right place. It is not dissimilar to an area being designated as a national park—if I can say that, in the south of Scotland—because it is more than just semantics. Definitions can motivate volunteers, garner public support and, perhaps most important, drive funding.

The Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest mission statement talks about restoring and expanding Scotland's rainforest. If that is the goal, please can we make sure that the south-west of Scotland is a part of it? I hope that Jenni Minto and the Scottish Government will give that some thought.

18:20

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): I, too, congratulate Jenni Minto on securing this very important debate for all of us tree lovers—as I assume all of us in the chamber are.

Jenni Minto: We are all tree huggers.

Graham Simpson: I will come on to that.

What is a rainforest? The Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest defines Scotland's rainforest as native woodland in the hyperoceanic zone of the west coast—woodland that is shaped by high rainfall, mild temperatures and a rich abundance of oceanic bryophytes and lichens. For those unfamiliar with bryophytes—who does not know what a bryophyte is—they include mosses, liverworts and hornworts. They absorb water directly through their leaves and stems, and Scotland is home to species that are found in very few other places in the world. That is pretty exciting, is it not? I think so. [*Interruption*.] I even got a cheer.

Scotland's rainforest is one of our country's most precious natural treasures, and I agree with Jenni Minto that that is still not recognised by many people. It supports an extraordinary diversity of plants, fungi, lichens and wildlife. It reminds us that globally significant nature is not something distant or exotic but is here, on our doorstep. People can visit it.

Given that around half of Scotland's remaining rainforest is found in Argyll and Bute, that area has a remarkable opportunity. It can lead the way in showing how habitat restoration succeeds when communities, conservation bodies and volunteers work together with purpose. Those points were made by Jenny Minto, and she is absolutely right.

I have visited the rainforest with other MSPs, which is where we hugged a tree, as Jenni Minto knows; I joined hands with Mark Ruskell and Monica Lennon on that visit to hug a giant ash tree. I will not tell you what happened to the ash tree afterwards. [*Laughter*.]

I was once the nature champion for the ash tree, about three years ago, until, I confess, I was dumped from that role after failing to stop ash dieback. Alison Thewliss will, I am sure, do a much

better job. Before that, I championed the holly, and now I am leading the charge for ancient woodlands—I am the ancient woodland champion, which is great. I am working with the Woodland Trust, of which I am a long-standing member, on a possible tree protection bill. That is at a very early stage, but I would like to think that it could attract support from across parties, because the issue is far too important to be reduced to party politics. Anyone who wants to be involved should come and speak to me; I can tell you where we are at; I can arrange meetings with the Woodland Trust; and you can see what you think. I think that we can shape that work together.

We can work together. We can protect Scotland's ancient woodlands, which is what I am trying to do, and, in that, we can help to protect the rainforest. I will leave it at that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Jim Fairlie to respond to the debate.

18:24

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): True to form, Jenni Minto delivered a wonderful speech, as she always does, with poetry and imagery. Any mention of an enchanted woodland works every time to evoke images in the mind of what a rainforest looks like. She asked a number of questions, which I hope I will cover as I go through my speech.

The debate comes at a time when countries around the globe continue to confront the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. As David Torrance mentioned, the question facing us all is very simple: what kind of environment do we want to leave behind for the next generations?

We have been clear that the climate and nature crises cannot be tackled in isolation and that our precious rainforest in Scotland is one of our critical ecosystems. We must restore those forests and the rare species and habitats, while storing carbon, strengthening resilience in our communities and helping to protect us all from the damaging effects of climate change. The same actions that support nature recovery contribute directly to our climate ambitions.

When people hear the word "rainforest", they often think of somewhere far away, such as the Amazon, yet one of the world's rarest rainforest habitats exists right here in Scotland, thanks to the mild climate and the high rainfall that we have on the west coast. Those woodlands support an extraordinary range of species. Jenni Minto mentioned glowworms and slime moulds, and Graham Simpson talked about various lichens, mosses and liverworts. They represent a natural asset of international importance, and their existence is also critical to human health, and to the air, water and food sources that we all rely on. Nothing about protecting the rainforest is an optional nice-to-do; it is critical for us all.

However, these forests face real pressures. Invasive non-native species, which a number of members have mentioned, as well as high deer numbers and habitat fragmentation, continue to threaten the condition and recovery of the forests. All that is taking place against the backdrop of a changing climate, which adds further uncertainty and pressure.

The Scottish Government is committed to enhancing and expanding Scotland's rainforest, which is a priority in Scotland's forestry strategy. Jenni Minto and David Torrance were right to highlight the central role that Argyll and Bute plays in that. We have published our strategic approach to restoring and expanding Scotland's rainforest, which, importantly, is underpinned by investment. Between April 2022 and July 2026, the Scottish Government provided more than £14.5 million for rainforest action. That was deployed via the nature restoration fund, the rainforest restoration fund and support for Forestry and Land Scotland's rainforest restoration activities, in addition to funding that is deployed through the forestry grant scheme.

Furthermore, the Scottish Government's facility for investment-ready nature in Scotland programme has funded the development of investment models and standards through an innovative project called saving Scotland's rainforest with natural capital finance. That project is currently exploring how responsible private finance could contribute to rainforest restoration, because tackling the twin crises of climate and biodiversity cannot be done by Governments alone.

The strategic approach to action, coupled with significant investment, is accelerating delivery and enabling partners and communities to address the challenges facing these iconic native woodlands. The Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest, which has been mentioned a number of times, has been central to that effort. Bringing together more than 40 organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors, the alliance has helped to create a shared vision for rainforest recovery in Scotland and it champions the action that is needed to turn the vision into reality.

Graham Simpson: Will the minister take up Jenni Minto's request to visit the rainforest, if he has not done so already? I invite him to attend the Woodland Trust's festive reception in the Parliament, which is on 15 December. That applies to all members, of course.

Jim Fairlie: On the latter point, I will see where I am on 15 December. To answer the question, last

year, I was in Arkaig—although it is not in Jenni Minto's constituency—and was taken through the rainforest there. As she was making her eloquent speech, the images of what I saw in Arkaig were very much coming to mind.

The Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest currently has 12 large-scale projects in development or delivery, covering almost 12,000 hectares. I put on record how much the Scottish Government values the alliance's leadership and the commitment that is shown by all its partners.

It is clear that community involvement is also essential. The rainforest restoration fund is helping to build local capacity through job creation, skills development and volunteer recruitment. Already, more than 40 volunteers have been recruited and trained through that fund. Today's debate has rightly highlighted the west Cowal rainforest biological recording project, which is a citizen science biodiversity survey led by Argyll Countryside Trust.

Since its launch in 2024, 171 committed and passionate volunteers have submitted 3,421 records covering 1,109 species. Among the most notable discoveries are hazel gloves fungus, plum-fruited felt lichen and the European glowworm. Those extraordinary findings demonstrate not only the richness of Scotland's rainforest but the fact that nature still has the power to surprise us. That work delivers more than the crucial protection of wildlife and habitats. Healthy woodlands store carbon, support climate adaptation, improve our ecological connectivity and help to sustain thriving and resilient rural communities.

Our ambition is clear. We want Scotland's rainforest to be larger, better connected and more resilient than it is today, and our work with partners is paving the way for that ambition to be realised. Scotland's rainforest is one of our greatest natural assets. Protecting it is not simply about preserving the past; it is about building a more secure future for the people of Scotland and safeguarding some of our most important biodiversity for generations to come.

Meeting closed at 18:31.

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