



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 29 April 2014

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 29 April 2014

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Anne Robertson, who is the minister of Danestone Congregational church in Aberdeen.

The Rev Anne Robertson (Danestone Congregational Church, Aberdeen): Thank you for inviting me to lead time for reflection, Presiding Officer.

A week past Sunday was Easter Sunday, which is a very important celebration for Christians around the world, when we celebrated Jesus's resurrection.

For my congregation, Easter Sunday tends to present them with something a little unexpected. Over the past few years, I have rearranged the seating so that everyone faced a side wall; I have had the congregation sit in a huge circle so that everyone was facing one another; I have crushed a Creme Egg in front of them; and I have bounced an egg off the communion table.

I do such things to be unpredictable. After all, nothing was as the disciples and the women expected it to be on that first Easter morning. They went to Jesus's grave expecting to find his body inside, with the stone rolled in front of the entrance, but that is not what they found. Understandably, they were very confused. After all, the unexpected and the unimaginable had happened—Jesus had risen from the grave.

Although on Easter Sunday I try to make things different or to do the unexpected in my church, I can never fully recreate the feelings that Jesus's followers must have had when they discovered the empty tomb, but what I can do is let my congregation experience the unexpected in a small way. As we go through life, it is rare for things to always pan out the way that we expect them to. At some point, we all face the unexpected, because life is not predictable. We should never assume that things will always go our way.

That lesson of not assuming things applies to us all as we live our lives. We should never assume to know what people are thinking or how they are feeling. We should treat everyone with respect. When Jesus said,

"Love your neighbour as yourself",

he meant that we should treat people the way that we want to be treated. Of course, that includes listening to what they are actually saying and not assuming that we know best.

I am sure that, as MSPs, you are all aware of the importance of stopping to listen and actually hear what is being said. However, my prayer is that, as well as listening to your constituents, you will listen to God, because that way, whether the expected or the unexpected happens, you will be ready to respond in his strength and to continue serving the people of Scotland.

Thank you.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Staffed Hospital Beds (Reduction)

1. Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on a recent study that indicates that the reduction in staffed hospital beds in Scotland is happening at one of the fastest rates in the developed world. (S4T-00678)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Care patterns have changed over the years. More care is delivered in the community, hospital stays are shorter and there is more same-day surgery, with no need for an overnight stay, which is good for patients.

Comparing the Scottish figures with those produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development shows that the rate of reduction in the number of beds in Scotland is slower than the United Kingdom rate of reduction. Furthermore, Scotland has more beds per head of the population than approximately half the countries that were included in the OECD analysis.

The number of staffed beds varies throughout the year to reflect service use. The most recent official statistics demonstrate that there has been an increase of 183 acute beds over the past year or so. We are not complacent. That is why we are developing an evidence-based bed-planning toolkit to ensure that we have the right number, mix and use of beds across Scotland.

Jim Hume: The reality is that the Government's own figures show that it has presided over a staggering decline in the number of hospital beds. When that decline is compared with the results of the OECD study, it is found to surpass the decline in nearly every other developed nation on earth.

The cabinet secretary claims that the delivery of more care in the community and shorter hospital stays have allowed the Scottish Government to reduce the number of available beds. Does he not accept that the intolerable pressure placed on the national health service and its hard-working staff, as highlighted by Dr Dewhurst earlier in the year, is a result of the decisions made by his Government, including the decision to cut thousands of staffed beds? Patients are experiencing shorter stays because someone is waiting on a trolley or in a waiting room to fill that bed.

Alex Neil: Over the past 10 years, major developments have taken place in the national health service, which I had believed every party

was signed up to. One such development was to transfer the care for mentally ill people out of hospitals and into the community as much as possible. Former health minister Andy Kerr summed up the situation beautifully when he said:

"There are good reasons for reductions in acute bed numbers:

Medical advances continue to reduce lengths of stay associated with many planned procedures, and some are now routinely carried out in a few hours without the need for any overnight stay."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 19 March 2007; S2W-32254]

A reduction in bed numbers is a reflection of medical advance. I accept that there are some areas where there have been pressures and where the bed numbers have been reduced too quickly. In those areas, we have reinstated beds. For example, 20 beds were reinstated recently in Fife. Undoubtedly, there has been a strategic shortage of beds in Edinburgh royal infirmary because of a 20 per cent gap between the population forecast for Edinburgh when the royal infirmary was planned 10 or 12 years ago and the population levels since that forecast. Steps have been taken to rectify that strategic shortage that we inherited.

Jim Hume: This Government has been in charge for seven years. It was only 16 months ago that, in one month alone, some 1,500 patients spent more than eight hours in accident and emergency. Does the cabinet secretary not agree that the fact that hospital beds are disappearing at a faster rate than is the case in almost every other country in the developed world is a cut too far and that the sticking-plaster approach to tackling problems in our NHS is simply not working?

Alex Neil: As we have made clear, the problem that some people have had to wait too long in A and E after the decision has been taken to admit them is due to the flow of patients rather than any strategic shortage in bed numbers. For example, in many hospitals, the percentage of patients who are discharged on any day before noon was only 6 per cent. We have increased that rate to 25 per cent. That has allowed the patient flow to be improved dramatically. As I say, it is very often the case that such issues relate to the patient flow rather than any strategic bed shortage, and where there has been a strategic shortage, we have taken steps to address that.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): After months of denial, we are seeing the extent of the pressures on NHS staff and the services that they provide fully exposed. For example, 130 beds are being blocked in this city alone. There are fewer staff, increasing demand and a social care crisis all within a system that has 6,000 fewer beds available. Will the cabinet secretary accept that we need a full independent and comprehensive NHS

review to ensure that it is fully staffed and equipped to meet the needs and demands of the 21st century?

Alex Neil: Mr Findlay wants a review because he has no policy or vision for the NHS. On the number of beds, his colleague Richard Simpson said:

“I welcome the fact that the cabinet secretary”—

that was Nicola Sturgeon at the time—

“has dropped some of the pledges that were made in the SNP’s manifesto of 2007, which were not appropriate. One example was not reducing the number of acute beds ... The cabinet secretary has now dropped that target, which is correct. If we can shift the balance of care ... it could result in a reduction in the number of acute beds.”—[*Official Report*, 8 June 2011; c 430.]

Labour’s spokesmen should get their act together on the issue.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Lab): It is pretty ripe to say that there is a division between Neil Findlay and me—that does not exist. The point that we are trying to make is that the spokesperson for the cabinet secretary’s party spent the two years from 2005 to 2007 attacking us for reducing bed numbers. The Scottish National Party then made a manifesto pledge in 2007 that it would not reduce bed numbers, and over the next four years it did not deal with the issue.

If we are going to have a mature debate, which I thought that we had started to do, we have to stop attacking one another on the basis of how we were before. The starting point for that is the cabinet secretary accepting that the attacks that his party made on our party when Andy Kerr was in charge were inappropriate and that the SNP’s pledge in 2007 was inappropriate. Will he do so? That is the starting point for our going on to agree on appropriate bed numbers, reflecting all the things that the cabinet secretary quite correctly talked about.

Alex Neil: The starting point for trying to secure consensus is neither the ridiculous remarks that Neil Findlay made or an attempt to rewrite history. Let us concentrate on the future on which I think that we are all agreed, which involves shifting care into a community setting or homes. That is the future of 21st century health. It is why the number of community nurses has been increased by 30 per cent, it is why we have integration of adult health and social care, and it is why we are shifting resources into the primary care sector.

My understanding was that the Labour Party agrees with that strategy, as do the Conservatives and the Liberals. Parties cannot sign up to a strategy that shifts the emphasis into the community and then make a song and dance because of a reduction in the number of acute

beds. If there are shorter stays, if mental health services are delivered in the community, and if the core of the strategy is about treating people in the community instead of in hospital, by definition we will not need the same number of acute beds. That goes without saying. People should be honest about the implications of following the strategy on which I thought we had reached a consensus.

Inshore Fisheries

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09836, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on inshore fisheries.

To all members who will take part in the debate, I say that we have a bit of time in hand, so the Presiding Officers will be generous with time. We encourage you to take interventions, and we will be able to give you some time back.

14:12

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I very much welcome today's debate on building a successful inshore fishing sector in Scotland. I am sure that members agree that, by devoting an afternoon—a substantial amount of time—to the topic, the Parliament is illustrating the growing importance that we all attach to this key fisheries sector.

As members know, this Parliament values any opportunity to celebrate fishing in Scotland. Our inshore sector, in particular, has a lot to be proud of and much to look forward to. The inshore fleet is comprised of trawlers, creelers, dredgers, netters, divers and hand gatherers, whose catch value in 2012 was nearly £90 million. There are approximately 1,500 vessels—often smaller boats with one or two-man crews, many of whom work part time or on a very local scale. We are talking about a very diverse sector.

The sector produces world-class products, such as hand-line mackerel, brown crab, scallops, lobsters and nephrops, to name but a few. The produce is enjoyed here in Scotland and is exported all over the world, playing a central role in Scotland's successful food and drink story.

The value of our inshore fishery is in not just its landings but the benefit that the sector brings to businesses that are often located in remote parts of the country. It is in how the sector helps to support local services and, crucially, the communities and people of Scotland who are part of it.

We want inshore fishing to be profitable and sustainable, and we want the quality premium produce that our fishermen put on our tables to be recognised world wide. At the first national inshore fisheries conference in March 2013, I gave a personal commitment to deliver real progress through our inshore fisheries strategy. At the second national inshore conference last month in Perth, I outlined how we are facilitating the development of a profitable and vibrant sector throughout Scotland.

The strategy focuses on three key components: improving the management of inshore fisheries through a network of inshore fisheries groups; improving engagement with inshore fishermen; and improving the evidence base for managing inshore fisheries.

Our first priority has been to strengthen the inshore fisheries group network. IFGs are non-statutory bodies that aim to improve the management of Scotland's inshore fisheries and give commercial inshore fishermen a much stronger voice in marine management developments.

There has been some real progress in the past 12 months on the organisation and direction of those groups. IFGs are at different stages of maturity around the coast, but meetings are well attended and we are starting to see the implementation of local management plans. For example, the Outer Hebrides IFG recently put forward plans to increase minimum landing sizes for some shellfish species. We are working with it to agree how best to advance those ideas. We are also seeing broader plans to develop new fisheries, improve the quality and value of products, and adopt sustainable fishing practices. Those are all very real and tangible actions that will have a positive impact.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for giving way—I understand that we have plenty time to continue to give way this afternoon.

I think that the cabinet secretary mentioned environmental improvements, and I believe that he would agree that technology has a huge role to play in them. Does he think that his Government is doing everything that it can to encourage the development of new technologies, particularly for scallop dredging? In his speech, can he expand a little on the work that the Government is doing?

Richard Lochhead: I will refer to innovation and technology later on. Alex Fergusson raises a very important point. We are constantly seeking out funds, particularly European funds. As he may know, we have, unfortunately, less than our fair share of European fisheries funds to devote to science and technology and innovation. I am happy to investigate what resource has been available for the scallop sector in particular, but we very much rely on the inshore fisheries groups to bring forward proposals as they look to develop management plans for local fisheries. We would look very seriously at ideas that required resource for technology and innovation.

Over the past 12 months, Marine Scotland has supported a variety of IFG projects, including the development and study of lobster habitats in

Orkney, a survey of cockle stocks in the Western Isles and a pilot study to improve the quality of hand-line mackerel in the east coast IFG area. In addition, we have devoted £200,000 to support IFG work and the implementation of management plan projects this coming year.

All those examples come from the initiatives of real fishermen working in the fishing grounds. I applaud their passion and commitment to local management and very much look forward to seeing even more initiatives come forward in 2014.

There are a number of opportunities to be pursued. We have to increase the value of the catch, reduce the reliance of many vessels on a handful of species and encourage diversification, expansion and development of new fisheries in inshore waters. All those objectives are extremely important. For the industry to be vibrant, we need to embrace innovation, which Alex Fergusson mentioned, and diversity.

It is vital that fishermen are an integral part of the process and have genuine responsibility for managing our local fisheries. Over the past year, I have been struck by the progress that inshore fishers have made in communicating their views and concerns to the Scottish Government—they have done that very well—and by how improvements in industry representation have begun to give the different sectors a much stronger voice. We have also stepped up our efforts to speak to fishermen around the Scottish coast through, for instance, our quayside conversations and other stakeholder meetings that we have held over the past year or two. More than 300 fishermen from all sectors have attended our quayside conversations. Such events are invaluable to us. They enable us to understand and respond to the day-to-day challenges that fishermen face, and to discuss all the opportunities that lie ahead.

Last year, I established the inshore fisheries management and conservation group, through which the Government is taking forward policy initiatives in a co-management relationship with the inshore sector. As a result of that direct engagement, Marine Scotland can take targeted action on the issues that are causing great concern to our fishermen and related onshore businesses.

Dialogue with fishermen is continuing this spring with the regional fishing industry assemblies that we are hosting around the country—they are taking place in all corners of Scotland. Five meetings have been held so far, and I was delighted to hear first hand from around 70 or 80 fishermen in Peterhead just last Friday evening.

The third strand of the strategy is to improve the evidence base for managing inshore fisheries. Science is an intrinsic part of fishing, and it is vital that we work together to improve the evidence base for fisheries management decisions. Over the past year, Marine Scotland has invested a lot in identifying a method of collecting valuable data on our fisheries that will allow us to manage our natural resources better at a local level. Although that may mean an increase in additional effort in the short term, I am sure that local fishermen will reap the benefits of that work to develop sustainable fisheries for the longer term.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the concerns about the scientific underpinning of the white-fish sector in recent years and the lag between the evidence being demonstrated and the effect that that has had on policy. Are we likely to see a similar lag in relation to the scientific underpinning of decisions on inshore fisheries, or is he alert to the problem and can it be addressed more successfully than in the white-fish sector?

Richard Lochhead: Liam McArthur is right that a long-standing issue in the white-fish sector has been the time lag that can often impact on the advice relating to total allowable catches. The more up to date the scientific advice is, the more accurate the assessments can be that lead to the final quota advice and fishing opportunities for Scotland. It remains to be seen whether we can speed up that timeline under the newly regionalised common fisheries policy, but I assure Liam McArthur that I am alive to the issue. I want us to do all that we can to shorten the timeline and ensure that we are using the most up-to-date science to advise us on future quotas.

Improved data collection in support of fisheries is important not only for the white-fish stocks that all our fleets depend on but for the IFG management plans that have been drawn up at a local level for areas around Scotland's coasts. Fishermen in several areas have now committed to the process of collecting more and better data on a voluntary basis, as they can see the benefits in the longer term from participating directly in improving the science. We should all commend that action.

Marine Scotland has ambitions to invest substantially in the area in the months and years ahead. We aim to modernise the management systems for inshore fisheries through data gathering, improving technology and investing generally in the IFGs. We will also turn to the appropriate European Union funding streams to support that crucial investment, as I mentioned in my response to Alex Fergusson.

I firmly believe that inshore fishing is heading in the right direction and I am committed to helping it

to achieve that. However, that does not mean that everything is rosy and that our inshore sector is not facing real and immediate challenges. One area that I have taken a close interest in is gear conflict in inshore waters. That happens where different sectors of the fleet compete for space and is usually best illustrated in the conflict between mobile and static gear, between creelers and trawlers and between those who are fishing for the same species in the same area. It is a long-standing, controversial and complex problem that does not lend itself to an easy or quick fix.

I emphasise again the right of each inshore fisherman to fish regardless of what type of gear he uses—provided that it is legal—but I will not tolerate deliberate acts of gear vandalism at sea. Too much of that is happening in Scotland's inshore waters. I have previously stated that my personal preference is for industry-led initiatives to prevent and resolve gear conflict. It is clear that when there is a breakdown in co-operation there needs to be a robust framework in place to bring restitution. The loss of a day's fishing to retrieve or mend damaged gear can have a significant financial toll on a fishing business. The Government task force that I established to examine the barriers to resolution is working on that problem now and I look forward to receiving its report in the summer.

Another area of concern has been the rise of unlicensed fishermen who sell their catch illegally. The issue is not about hobby fishermen catching a few lobsters for the pot—that is one thing, but it is not acceptable for an unlicensed fisherman to blatantly circumvent fishing rules, potentially undermining the long-term sustainability of our stocks and depressing the market for commercial fishermen. A short-term industry working group has been established to look at the potential options for stamping out that practice.

I have to react to short-term crisis as well as to those longer-term challenges. Like many people in Scotland, our inshore fishermen sometimes face economic hardship because of bad weather and rising costs. I recently identified £400,000 to provide financial assistance to the creel fishermen who were hit the hardest following the recent extreme weather in Scotland.

Marine Scotland has received 311 applications for assistance and, in partnership with the industry, we will establish in the next few weeks the criteria for issuing the awards. We plan to make awards to fishermen by the end of May. However, I do not want to make just short-term cash awards to alleviate pressure. I will also provide funding to assist Seafood Scotland with marketing initiatives to support inshore catches, because ultimately we need to maximise the value

of every fish landed and develop vibrant, profitable markets.

There are other challenges. I am well aware that the competing demands for space in our seas are an issue of particular concern to many of the fishermen whom I meet. Scotland's seas are home to beautiful and vibrant natural features that truly deserve to be afforded protection and recognition, which is why we are taking steps to protect our marine environment. However, fishermen and fishing communities also depend on the ability to catch and sell fish. All users have a legitimate expectation and a right to a fair share of this national resource, and they need to work together to find how wider marine interests can co-exist in the shared marine environment.

We have also been keen to develop our plans for marine protected areas through thorough engagement with fishing communities right around Scotland's coast. We will strive to ensure that our MPA network strikes the right balance between conserving our precious marine features and respecting the needs of the fishing industry. There is also the untapped potential of renewable energy generation to consider; it is a developing industry that I am sure will be vital to the future prosperity of this country, including our coastal communities.

On how we manage our inshore waters, we have some special projects under way. I was delighted to attend a Marine Scotland summit last week at which the Government's ambition on and commitment to piloting new approaches to fisheries management in the Clyde were demonstrated. There was consensus on the need for change and enthusiasm to make progress in improving the ecosystem in the Clyde, including a better mix of commercially exploitable fish species. Marine Scotland is now working closely with the industry to develop a Clyde 2020 action plan, based on the conclusions of last week's summit. I believe that the eyes of Scotland will be on the Clyde.

Liam McArthur: I understand that the summit was very positive. Charles Millar, director of the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust, has been in touch with me and my colleague Tavish Scott to indicate the desire to pursue the option of a regulating order in due course, leaning very heavily on the experience from Shetland. Is the cabinet secretary giving the matter active consideration?

Richard Lochhead: In relation to the organisation that Liam McArthur mentioned, we have said that we are looking forward to receiving an application for a regulating order. We will seriously consider the application, which will have to go out to consultation in due course. There are some legislative tools in the box that we can use

to help manage our inshore fisheries in the months and years ahead.

Looking to the future, the fishing industry has to compete for labour with many new and emerging industries as well as with existing sectors such as oil and gas. Only by providing attractive employment opportunities can we ensure that people are attracted to fishing as a career and to joining the new generation of fishermen. In order to provide more fishing opportunities for existing inshore fishermen and new entrants, I recently announced my plans to allocate an additional 1,000 tonnes of mackerel opportunities for the under-10m fleet. Those opportunities have the potential to inject an additional gross for the Scottish inshore fleet of around £1.2 million, with additional downstream benefits to local processing and other inshore interests.

By identifying and grasping such opportunities, we can look forward to a vibrant future and at the same time encourage new entrants into the sector. We can also ensure that there are fewer barriers to those who want to join the industry. I am heartened to see young folk coming into the sector. Young men usually start out on the smaller creel vessels, but it is important that they have that opportunity to get on the first rung of the ladder.

When I look back over what has happened in the past year, I am hugely encouraged by all the developments, projects and initiatives that are now in full swing. IFGs are now heading in the right direction. They are not perfect but are proving an effective way for fishermen to provide input into the improvement of local fisheries. We also now have a national forum: the inshore fisheries management and conservation group, which I have mentioned, discusses national issues of importance to the inshore sector and helps to steer inshore fisheries policy.

The inshore strategy is tackling improvements that are needed to enhance the evidence base for managing our fisheries and putting the industry on a more stable footing. As I said, the sector now has a bigger voice through improved representation. We are listening more than ever before to inshore fishermen and taking action to provide support to them where we can.

We can safely say that we have laid the foundations to improve fisheries management and the sector's interaction with the wider environment. There is always much more that can be done, but real progress is being made. I hope that the Parliament will support all efforts to recognise and support the contribution that our inshore fishermen make to Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the importance of Scotland's inshore fisheries as reflected in the inshore

fisheries strategy; notes that the strategy has three main components, improving the evidence base for managing inshore fisheries, improving engagement with inshore fishermen and strengthening management through the network of inshore fisheries groups; commends the important economic and cultural contribution made to Scotland by some 1,500 inshore fishing vessels and associated onshore seafood businesses, and supports the further development of inshore fisheries as a profitable, sustainable and vibrant sector, which exports top-quality, high-value products all over the world.

The Presiding Officer: I call Claudia Beamish, who has a generous 10 minutes.

14:30

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I recognise, as the Scottish Government does in its motion, the vital role that the inshore fisheries sector plays in the Scottish economy, as well as the central contribution that the sector makes to supporting communities. We must remember that sea fishing, even—or sometimes especially—in inshore waters, can be a dangerous business. We should recognise the risks that fishermen of all sorts take in exploiting such valuable resources.

A strong and sustainable inshore fisheries sector is an essential component of ensuring the viability of many coastal communities. I emphasise that this debate—like others in the rural affairs and the environment portfolio—should be viewed in the context of sustainable development, rather than the Scottish Government's chosen phrase of sustainable economic growth. Economic growth is certainly important, but the focus should not rest solely on it. We should pay special heed to environmental and social concerns.

If Scotland's fisheries are not fished in an environmentally sustainable manner—

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will the member take a brief intervention?

Claudia Beamish: Yes.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the member agree that not all the inshore fishermen are human? There are seals and otters that depend on vibrant inshore stocks. We have a wider objective when we support the conservation and appropriate exploitation of stocks.

Claudia Beamish: I thank the member for his interesting intervention. I am glad that there was a corollary to the first part of it; otherwise, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation might have shown concern. I agree with him that we must look at carefully and protect the food web and the food chain in the wider context of our marine habitat and ecosystems.

It is no secret that some inshore stocks have declined in recent years so, as the cabinet

secretary said, it is essential that the management of fragile fish populations is fit for purpose. The nephrops population in the Clyde is in particular danger. The Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust has pointed out that an estimated 20 per cent of nephrops are affected with a parasite that makes them unsaleable and that more than 80 per cent are caught with plastic in their stomachs.

Like me, some members in the chamber today contributed to Kenny Gibson's members' business debate on the Clyde 2020 initiative, in which we discussed the prospect of the Clyde fulfilling the EU requirement to be of good environmental status by 2020. It was encouraging to hear the cabinet secretary's comments on the summit that was held over Easter. I understand that many hope that the regulating order will proceed. If I read the situation right and if a consultation is likely, that is a good step forward.

The fisheries sector is not the only one to be found in Scotland's inshore waters. There are a range of economic and environmental interests—including renewable energy, oil and gas and telecommunications—in the 12 nautical miles that Marine Scotland manages. A detailed plan for accommodating those often competing interests is desperately needed. The marine strategy framework directive sets challenging expectations for achieving good environmental status by 2020 and we must all work in that context.

It is therefore essential to put in place the long-awaited national marine plan—I was somewhat surprised that the cabinet secretary did not mention it in his speech—so that the strategic direction is clear for all who use our inshore waters. That will inevitably mean giving priority to some sectors over others in some areas. I reiterate the call that many make to the Scottish Government not to try to be all things to all people but to take the tough decisions that are needed to ensure the long-term viability and health of our inshore waters.

The development of the regional marine planning partnerships under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 will be key. Will the cabinet secretary in his closing speech shed any light on progress on them?

In conjunction with the soon-to-be-announced network of marine protected areas, we have the opportunity to set out plans for marine management. I hope that the cabinet secretary will confirm soon that some of the proposed MPAs have been put in place.

Marine spatial planning is indeed a complex issue, not least because it is three dimensional rather than two dimensional—as planning on land is—which makes it even more complex. Continuing scientific research by the Scottish

Government and all partners is essential in finding the way forward.

On MPAs, will the cabinet secretary clarify the purpose of that designation in relation to inshore fisheries? Scottish Environment LINK and others are concerned that MPAs will be set with the purpose of protecting a particular feature in a given area but will allow other practices to take place there. Does the cabinet secretary agree that inshore waters are best served by having MPAs work towards wider ecological enhancement rather than a narrow, feature-based purpose? Also, does he agree that more MPAs should be given the purpose of enhancing rather than conserving?

I was heartened to see in the Scottish Fishermen's Federation's spring newsletter that the Scottish Fishermen's Trust has made financial awards to a range of conservation and science initiatives, backing

"innovative projects that aim to build up a bigger bank of knowledge to inform future management of our precious fisheries in all sectors."

Will the cabinet secretary reassure the many stakeholders that Marine Scotland is adequately funded to support the research challenges of the future?

That brings me to the inshore fisheries groups, which were set up by Marine Scotland in 2009 and were intended to fulfil the purpose of local management. I support the reasoning behind them, but I have some concerns that the groups' sole focus on fishing and economic issues is perhaps too narrow. Has the cabinet secretary considered whether the IFGs could incorporate other interests, particularly conservation groups, to allow broader discussions about the health of these waters? That might not help to alleviate the—how can I put it?—passionate exchanges of opinions that can take place at the meetings, but it is important not to overly pigeonhole sectors when discussing management options for a shared marine resource. I know that Scottish Environment LINK also has reservations about the remit. It argues that the focus might be too narrow and that maintaining and restoring the quality of the inshore marine environment for fisheries and wildlife should be explicitly stated as part of the remit.

It is reassuring that the IFG management plans are subject to strategic environmental impact assessment, but will the cabinet secretary explain whether the inshore fisheries plans will be subject to an EIA to build on that? I am sure that he will agree that the management plans must be able to adapt depending on the science and other developments, and his highlighting of the three main aims of the strategy today was useful and helpful.

The topic of IFGs brings me to another important aspect of managing inshore fisheries—the widespread problem of gear conflict. The continuing conflict between fishermen in the static and mobile sectors is being addressed, but it is not yet resolved in many places. It is difficult to create a system in which the creelers and other static gear fishermen can operate in the same space as mobile trawlers or dredgers, but it is vital that clear and fair systems are created, and they might be time managed as well as space managed.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The member mentioned the conflict between creel fishermen and trawlers. Does she accept that both have a rightful place in the inshore industry?

Claudia Beamish: I accept that all fishing, as long as it can be proved to be sustainable, has a rightful place. On bottom-towed gear, I understand that the Marine Scotland task force is looking into the issue, as the cabinet secretary highlighted, and I know that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is much against the possible legislation and would like non-statutory attempts to resolve the problem to be the way forward. I hope that they are not exhausted.

I am also aware that the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation believes that the restrictions on bottom-towed gear within 3-mile limits should never have been lifted in the 1980s and believes that that has led to a decline in some stocks. The statistics appear to support that for some species, but I suggest that we should be wary of placing blame on one sector over another, as the picture is often complicated and overfishing with static gear can be just as harmful to stocks as unregulated mobile practices.

I hope that the quayside conversations that the cabinet secretary highlighted will contribute in some way to resolving the issues. That said, I draw attention to the practice of dredging for scallops and the damaging effect that it can have on the marine environment.

Dredging on a large scale can cause irreparable damage to the sea bed and destroy fragile nursery grounds. I understand that, once again, it comes down to weighing economic interests and environmental impacts, but I ask the cabinet secretary to explain what Marine Scotland is doing about the impact that dredging has on the marine environment.

What work is being done to develop the selective fishing gear that helps to avoid bycatch as well as to reduce the number of creels per boat and per area? Will the cabinet secretary highlight the measures that Marine Scotland has taken to ensure that gear conforms with up-to-date

technical standards? Proper and sound gear—static and mobile—is essential.

More generally, does the cabinet secretary have a view on no-take zones? Some argue that they enable juvenile fish to develop and can be used as a comparator with areas that are being fished.

On monitoring and enforcement, I was somewhat reassured by the cabinet secretary's remarks today, but will he assure us that the arrangements are robust, as there have been no prosecutions to date? That will give confidence to all concerned.

The sustainability of our inshore fisheries is also essential for the onshore processing industry. Burgon (Eyemouth) Ltd, in my region, has its own boats and processes crabs, as the cabinet secretary will know, and it has strong sustainability practices.

The Labour amendment argues that local food chains and raising public awareness of the benefits of domestic consumption are vital. We in Scotland need to develop a sense of adventure about the inshore fish that we try. Exports are important but what is the Scottish Government doing to promote the consumption of different inshore fish, such as spider crabs and razor clams in Scotland?

To come full circle, if we are to work for the recovery and enhancement of a diverse fishery in Scotland, we need to listen to those members of the Community of Arran Seabed Trust and others who made the film "Caught in Time" about Lamlash Bay so long ago, and who have been arguing for decades that we are fishing down the food web, or food chain. That must not be allowed to go on. The evidence is still stark, and we congratulate those who have done all the hard work so far. Scottish Labour will work tirelessly with the Scottish Government, and we will challenge it whenever that is necessary. We need sustainable inshore fisheries for generations to come, and that will only come about through all the stakeholders working together.

I move amendment S4M-09836.1, to insert at end:

"recognises the role played by the industry in promoting seafood supply chains locally and the importance of raising public awareness of the benefits of domestic consumption, as well as recognising the importance of the export market; recognises the vital role played by inshore fisheries in supporting local economies, and understands the necessity of engaging with all marine stakeholders, including conservation and community groups, to ensure the protection and enhancement of Scotland's inshore waters in the present as well as for future generations."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I now call Jamie McGrigor. You have a generous seven minutes.

14:42

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am pleased to be able to open for the Scottish Conservatives in today's debate. I thank those organisations that have sent in briefings for today. As our party's fisheries spokesman, and as a member of the Scottish Parliament for the Highlands and Islands, I am very conscious of the importance of our inshore fisheries, and I am happy to support the broad thrust of the Government's motion and Claudia Beamish's amendment.

The Scottish Conservatives agree that the economic importance of inshore fishing is significant. That is often especially so in the more remote rural and island communities of my region, where the jobs that it sustains are vital to fragile local economies, as they also are in a lot of mainland places. The inshore fishing industry is also important to Scotland's overall economy, with the value of the catch in 2012 being estimated at almost £90 million.

We also acknowledge the concerns that have been expressed today and on many previous occasions about the overfishing of fin-fish stocks in inshore waters in previous decades. Surely we can all agree that the sustainable harvesting of our inshore waters is a good way to go.

Stewart Stevenson mentioned seals and otters. Seals certainly eat huge numbers of fish, but we must not forget sea birds such as gannets, fulmar, kittiwakes, cormorants, shags, storm petrels, razorbills and guillemots, to name but a few. They, too, exist on small fish and, lately, the decline of sea birds, possibly because of lack of feeding, has worried many.

The creel fishermen, whose boats make up 74 per cent of Scotland's inshore commercial fishing fleet, harvest prawns, lobster and crabs, including edible crabs—the brown ones—velvet crabs, spider crabs and green crabs. They also catch some of the highest quality shellfish products available probably anywhere in the world.

Creel fishing methods are fuel efficient and discards are virtually non-existent. Scallop fishing, which Claudia Beamish mentioned, is also important, and we hope that technological developments can increase the sustainability of that fishery as we move forward. Scallops and shellfish are crucial to Scotland's reputation for high-quality fresh food products, and are used in the domestic restaurant and hotel trade all over Scotland as well as being exported throughout Europe and beyond.

Scottish langoustines are rightly famous for their superb quality and taste, and are prized in Spain, Italy, France, Portugal and many other countries. We should not forget the razorfish—or "spoots" as

they are known in the Western Isles—because those are delicious too.

The motion refers to the "three main components" of the inshore fisheries strategy, one of which is

"improving engagement with inshore fishermen".

We are very supportive of that. We want scientists and Government at all levels to work in conjunction with our fishermen, who have first-hand knowledge and practical experience of our fishing environments that they have built up over generations and centuries.

That should happen across all fisheries sectors, which is something for which I have consistently argued during my time as an MSP. I made the argument just a few weeks ago in Kenneth Gibson's debate on Clyde 2020, and many of the issues that emerged in that debate are just as relevant today.

As we move forward with the development of the six large inshore fisheries groups, we need to learn from the experiences of the first six smaller pilot groups. Those groups need to have maximum involvement from individual inshore fishermen themselves and from their representatives in the local fishermen's associations and the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation. The voice of processors is also vital.

As I suggested in the Clyde 2020 debate, the operation of the shellfish regulating order in Shetland is a good example of stakeholders working positively together, and we should look to emulate the good practice that has come from that approach in other places.

I welcome the recent announcement of an increase of 1,000 tonnes in the mackerel quota for inshore fishing in 2014, which takes it up to 1,300 tonnes. As Duncan MacInnes, secretary of the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, has said, that additional allocation for the under-10m sector of the fleet is especially welcome in the Western Isles, where there is demand for developing a small, localised, selective fishery with no discards, with premium prices being paid to the fishermen.

Before I conclude, I will flag up a practical safety issue that representatives of the Clyde Fishermen's Association asked me to raise today regarding concerns about the number of cables that are being laid in inshore waters. There are both power and communication cables currently going through the consenting process, and guidelines on best practice call for those cables to be buried to address safety issues such as the fouling of cables by fishing gear and anchors. There are examples of vessels being lost as a result of fouling, and the matter requires to be

examined for the safety of our fishermen, who risk their lives in many other ways.

Despite the guidelines, a licence was recently issued for a power cable in the Clyde with no compulsion to bury, in the face of protests from the fishing industry, which voiced concerns on safety grounds. The cabinet secretary might wish to comment on that in his closing speech.

The Conservatives welcome today's debate and share the desire that members on all sides have expressed for our inshore fisheries to have a positive and sustainable future. We look forward to progress being made through collaborative working as we move forward, in the interests of our economy, our environment, our fishermen and the very special communities along our coastline that depend on their activities.

I have acted as an assistant to lobster fishermen in the Western Isles, particularly on the island of Coll, where I have helped since the early 1960s, and on the island of Harris. It is unusual not to see basking sharks off the island of Coll when the creels are being pulled up, and seals are numerous—I assure the cabinet secretary that there is no shortage of them.

I see that I have passed the seven-minute mark, Presiding Officer. Do you wish me to continue?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have done very well.

Jamie McGrigor: I could go on for another half minute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, please—if you have something important to say.

Jamie McGrigor: It is on the subject of fisheries, although it is not about the inshore sector in particular. The First Minister said in his recent speech in Belgium that the fishing fleets of 12 countries might be denied access to Scottish waters and, as a consequence, to Norwegian waters. Bertie Armstrong, the leader of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation said:

"Is this a threat to the rest of Europe or is fishing being placed on the table as a bargaining counter?"

I wonder whether the cabinet secretary might want to comment on that when he is winding up the debate, if he has plenty of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate, with six-minute speeches, although we have time for generous contributions.

14:51

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Jamie McGrigor started well, although unfortunately his ending was not so much to my liking. However, at the start of his speech, he gave

us a good idea for what we can all have for dinner tonight.

On the other hand, I am not so sure that I was ready to hear what I heard from Claudia Beamish. Her amendment talks about recognising

"the role played by the industry in promoting seafood supply chains locally and the importance of raising public awareness of the benefits of domestic consumption".

I very much agree with that but, unfortunately, she used 11 minutes to talk about conservation and only 30 seconds to talk about the industry. I would like to talk a lot more about the industry.

I am delighted to speak on the Scottish fishing industry, which has a great tradition and is now looking forward to a bright future. That was not always the case; Scottish fishing is a tradition that was born of necessity. A few centuries ago, people who were living off the land had to move to the coast and were forced to adjust to a new lifestyle and to try to earn a living from fishing, which most of them had no experience of. That is why I believe that management of our inshore fisheries sector is as much about our traditional fishing rights as it is about securing a bright and vibrant industry for generations to come.

Every year, £90 million-worth of seafood is landed by 1,500 inshore fishing vessels, which shows us the importance of inshore fisheries to the Scottish fishing industry as a whole. As the cabinet secretary said, the three main components of the Scottish Government's inshore fisheries strategy are management of inshore fisheries, engagement with inshore fishermen and the strengthening of management through the network of inshore fisheries groups. Those components are recognised by the whole industry as being great achievements on which to build.

As the Scottish Government motion suggests, the issue is about not only the great economic success of the industry but the cultural contribution of our fishermen and fishing communities to our past and Scotland's future. I spent the past 30 years exporting the sort of top quality high-value seafood products that Jamie McGrigor talked about, and I have never stopped promoting Scotland since I came to this country. Some of the best seafood that Scotland has to offer is in our restaurants and on the fish counters of our fishmongers and retailers.

As the Labour amendment suggests, we all have a responsibility to raise public awareness of the benefits of domestic consumption. I welcome Labour's contribution to the debate and I urge Claudia Beamish and other members to support industry calls for consumers to buy local and eat Scottish. After the fantastic work of our fishermen, a few years ago I produced, with the Scottish Seafood Association in Peterhead, posters to

celebrate the fact that Scottish fish are back, both in number and size.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Does Christian Allard agree that it is important that our children, through our schools and the curriculum for excellence, be made more aware of the value of our fishing industry and the product, and that they be encouraged to seek that product when they go shopping with their parents?

Christian Allard: My friend Dennis Robertson is right about that; he is highlighting good work that is done in schools just now. Jimmy Buchan, who is a skipper, is very much involved in that, and I congratulated him on that the last time I saw him in Peterhead.

In 2013, I was one of the hundreds of people in the industry who attended the quayside conversations, which were part of Marine Scotland's strategy to improve engagement with the industry and to meet fishermen and onshore interests to hear at first hand their concerns for the future of the industry. In total, 18 quayside conversations were held. We talked about quota ownership, leasing costs, the lack of flexibility in the cod recovery plan, the conflict that the cabinet secretary talked about, diversification, flexibility, new entrants, marine protection areas and creel management.

We also talked about another important part of the sector: the processing sector. A need for greater support for the onshore sector was highlighted, as were the need to promote new markets and to provide continuity of supply, which is important. We can find that continuity of supply through the inshore fisheries.

We need a local approach to fisheries management—a uniform approach does not work and the local situation clearly needs to be taken into account. It is important for the local fleet to protect local fishermen who operate smaller boats, in order to secure fishing opportunities.

One of the many responses to the quayside conversations from the Scottish Government has already created many opportunities for the offshore and onshore sectors. In particular, it increased the opportunities for inshore hand-line mackerel fishing, as Jamie McGrigor pointed out. The industry asked for more fishing opportunities to be distributed to hand-line mackerel fishers in order to meet growing demand and to provide for a high-value sector that can bring considerable economic benefits to communities. At the time, after Seafish produced adverts encouraging people to eat more mackerel, fish processors considered it a priority to increase opportunities for inshore hand-line mackerel fishing, and it is still a priority. We all welcome the 1,000 extra tonnes of Scotland's mackerel allocation that were allocated

to the inshore fishery. Local approaches to fisheries management work.

Another of the quayside discussions highlighted the need for better industry representation and engagement. I recall that, in those conversations on the quayside, many people branded organisations such as the SFF and Seafish “out of touch” and said that they did not listen to, or reflect, the needs of everyone who contributes to the industry.

Following the successful quayside conversations events, Marine Scotland is this year holding a series of regional fishing industry assemblies. I welcome that, because it is important that the Scottish Government and Marine Scotland listen to every member of the industry—not only the representatives, but all fishermen and people who work onshore. I thank the Scottish Government for keeping the dialogue going with the industry, but I would really like the fishing organisations that operate in Scotland to consider how better they could interact with the people whom they represent.

I did not receive a briefing from Seafish or the Scottish Fishermen's Federation prior to the debate—I do not know whether any of the other members did. I will contact both organisations and ask them why.

The SFF has been busy talking about the future of the industry, but only the future after a yes vote in September this year. As much as I like Bertie Armstrong's optimism, I urge him to consider the two futures under the options of a yes vote and a no vote. I welcome his statement of 1 April this year that

“the SFF will be asking both sides of the independence debate over the coming weeks.”

Let us hope that April was the month for hard questions to the yes campaign and next month will be the turn of the no campaign.

I thank the Scottish Government for its actions, and I thank Scotland's cabinet secretary, Richard Lochhead, for his hard work in focusing on delivering progress through the Government's inshore fisheries strategy.

I want a profitable and vibrant Scottish fishing sector for generations to come. Fishing will never be a finite resource. The strengths of Scotland's seafood sector, supported by the Government, show that Scotland can be a successful and independent country.

14:59

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): The inshore fisheries sector accounts for about three quarters of the Scottish fleet and, in 2012, was worth £87 million in catch. It is clearly

economically important, but as my colleague Claudia Beamish said, it requires to be regulated because of the potential conflicts between the interests of the fishing industry, the renewables sector, the environment and the animals that depend upon the environment.

My contribution today will to a certain extent be a cautionary tale—but one that I hope will eventually have a happy ending. It concerns the chequered history of the Solway cockle fishery, which serves as an example of what has not worked, and the complexities of finding a solution.

Although they are perhaps not as popular in the UK as scallops and oysters, cockles are greatly in demand in many parts of Europe; in fact, they are possibly an example of a seafood that could be promoted for domestic consumption, along with spider crabs and razor shells.

In the early 2000s, the unregulated cockle fishery in the Solway involved hundreds of cocklers using a range of techniques from hand gathering to dredging. As a result, stocks became dangerously depleted. The Scottish Executive, as it was then, recognised that the situation was untenable and introduced a regulating order for the Scottish side of the Solway Firth. I am sure that Alex Fergusson recalls that process. I believe that he raised a number of concerns over the period. The order enabled the Solway Shellfish Management Association to regulate the fishery, and to issue licenses to those who were permitted to fish.

The SSMA was funded initially by what was then Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway and by Dumfries and Galloway Council, but was intended to be self-financing in the longer term, through license fees and a levy on the cockles taken, and through the establishment of a trading arm, which was called Solway Shellfish Trading. A closed season from April to October was imposed, during which cockles could not be taken.

Unfortunately, from the very start that solution failed to work. The first fishing season was reduced due to the timing of the order's being enacted, but as soon as it was, the problems became apparent. Arguments arose about granting of licenses, unlicensed cockling continued to take place and the SSMA was expected to police the Solway but was totally unable to do so. I heard myriad complaints from constituents and local cocklers who were angry because they had not been awarded licenses when larger vessels from outwith Dumfries and Galloway had been. There were disputes between cocklers employing different methods—the cabinet secretary has already mentioned problems with people using different gear for the same species. There were concerns from constituents who had observed fishers going into the Solway and were unsure

whether they were there legally, and there were tales of gangs of illegal immigrants being taken down to the Solway at various times. Many people, including me, felt a sense of relief when the season was over.

The high price that is commanded by cockles encouraged dangerous illegal practices, with unlicensed cocklers having to be rescued from totally unsuitable vessels. In some instances, individuals were rescued more than once, such was the financial incentive to continue to take cockles. One guy who was brought in one night after he was found trying to fish from a rubber dinghy was discovered out in the Solway again the next night. That incident took place not very long after the Morecambe Bay tragedy, so it is strange to think of people putting their lives at risk in that way, especially somewhere like the Solway Firth where, as they say, the tide comes in faster than a galloping horse.

Of course, with all the activity that should not have been taking place, the cockle stocks again declined dramatically. The SSMA issued only 100 licences over five years. It was not able to become financially viable and it continued to require repeated additional funding from the council. The SSMA was wound up in September 2011, and management reverted to the Scottish Government. At that time, the fishery was closed to allow time for stocks to recover, and it has remained closed ever since.

Alex Fergusson: I share Elaine Murray's views on the tragedy that was SSMA. Does she agree that the problem with that structure was that there was a complete failure to engage with local fishermen and to use the knowledge that they have to manage and to help to police the fishery?

Elaine Murray: Indeed. I will deal with some things that are happening now, which address some of those issues.

Local stakeholders are keen for the fishery to reopen because of its benefits to the local economy. Marine Scotland therefore convened a meeting in November 2012 to explore options, with a follow-up meeting last April at which it was announced that a scientific survey was to take place during May and June. The tender for that was advertised through the public contracts Scotland web portal, with a closing date of 3 May last year. The survey was supposed to report back in July, but I think that work is still under way on it.

During the meetings with Marine Scotland, a number of points were made to the effect that there is no support for reopening the fishery without a workable management scheme's being put in place, perhaps through a local co-operative, and to the effect that sufficient local involvement in discussions is needed—that is relevant to Alex

Fergusson's question—with opportunities for joint policing across the border, because the Solway fishery extends along both sides of the border.

The scientific survey that was supposed to report in July does not seem to have done so. According to the website of the Solway Firth Partnership, which was allocated the task of communicating with all the interests in the fishery, the Marine Scotland science study is expected to conclude this spring. The study will include examination of issues such as health and safety and the benefits of a single distribution point, where all cockles are recorded and cross-referenced with beach landings, which will address some of the policing issues.

The partnership's website reports that co-ordinated work to reopen the Solway cockle fishery and to maximise its benefit to the local economy is in full progress. However, it notes the need to balance the needs of environment and wildlife with the economic benefits that are accrued by harvesting cockles. I am pleased to say that that is much in line with the sentiments of the Labour amendment, which stresses the need for engaging all marine stakeholders.

The Solway Firth Partnership is conducting a review of management options, including an analysis of past management experience—much of it bad—and comparison of management practices on both sides of the Solway, including an examination of the legislation that underpins that management. It links in to the work of project inshore—a project on the other side of the border that is being led by Seafish—which is mapping inshore fisheries in English waters with the aim of providing each with a sustainability plan. The Solway Firth Partnership intends to produce its report in the spring, so the two reports will come fairly close together.

We all hope that when stocks have recovered, it will be possible to reopen the cockle fishery, even if it is only for six months every year. It is to be hoped that this time it will be managed effectively and sustainably. We must learn the lessons of the past.

15:07

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I was in Mallaig on Saturday and met the new chief executive of the Mallaig & North West Fishermen's Association Ltd, Tom Bryan-Brown. If I remember correctly, Tom is from Sussex but he told me that he has fished out of Oban, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man, so he brings experience. He is quickly getting up to speed in his new job; I hope to work with him for many years to come.

Of course, Mallaig is not what it was in fishing terms, although unlike my native Lossiemouth, it has not lost all of its fishing boats. Lossie is now really just a large marina, rather than a bustling fishing port, although some fishermen from Lossie still fish out of other ports. There is nothing wrong with marinas, which are something we need to develop on the west coast, so I am pleased to see that Mallaig is developing its marina trade, as well.

An issue that was raised by Jamie McGrigor was also raised with me by Tom Bryan-Brown. It is to do with the broadband cable that we are getting on the west coast, courtesy of the Scottish Government's funding of a roll-out of broadband fibre optic throughout the west coast. We are getting it right up through Mallaig and across to Skye. Tom asked about the very issue that was raised by Jamie McGrigor, which was whether the cable from Mallaig to Armadale will be buried because, if it is not, it could create problems for the fishermen. I hope that my office is, at this very moment, diligently following through with Highlands and Islands Enterprise and BT to find out what will happen to that cable.

It pleases me that I can confidently say to people who work in the industry that the Scottish Government recognises that inshore fishing is the lifeblood of many coastal communities. I know that the Government will do all that it can, with the powers that it has, to safeguard the future of inshore fishing. However, the question is not just what the Scottish Government can do for the inshore fishing community, but what the community already does for Scotland. Inshore fishing is interwoven in the fabric of Scotland's coastal culture; it is an integral part of coastal heritage. Long may that continue.

The inshore fishing industry is the glue that binds people in our coastal communities together. It supports schools, local services and businesses, and does so in the most remote parts of our country. For that reason, I am committed to ensuring that the sector continues to be a vibrant and profitable one, particularly in my constituency, where there are many small boats, especially over on the west coast.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the recent Scottish Government creel support fund initiative which, according to a recent letter that I received from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead, has received more than 300 applications. The scheme was set up because many creel fishermen experienced hard financial times in 2013, due to a combination of extreme weather, which led to loss of fishing gear, and a reduced catch. The £400,000 that has been set aside by the Scottish Government will contribute to easing the financial pressures that are faced by many people in the

industry. For that reason, I look forward to the announcement of successful awards.

The creel support fund follows the fund that was established last summer for whitefish and prawn fishermen and illustrates yet again that the Scottish Government recognises the importance of the fishing industry as a whole, and that we take very seriously the plight of the people who are experiencing genuine hardship. There are of course, natural and commercial variations with which our fishermen contend every year, but what that highlights is that it is crucial for industry and Government to communicate, and that we ensure that we work together to facilitate the best outcome for the fishing community.

The future does look bright. The recently announced £700,000 package of additional Scottish Government funding to position Scotland as a world-leading provider of seafood will enhance the seafood sector and improve collaboration along the seafood supply chain, including inshore fisheries.

However, as a result of our being a pretty low priority for the UK in EU fishing negotiations, the Scottish Government can do only so much under our current constitutional arrangements. Right now, we receive just 1.1 per cent of European fisheries funding, despite landing 7 per cent of the European Union's wild-caught fish.

Despite two thirds of the UK fishing industry's being based in Scotland, Scottish ministers have not been allowed to speak on behalf of the UK in Europe, even on occasions when the interest is almost exclusively Scottish. To highlight the nonsense of the current set-up, can anyone ever imagine a situation in which Belgium would let the Netherlands do Belgium's bidding in relation to European matters? That is where we find ourselves, with Westminster making representations on Scotland's behalf, about an industry that does not really feature on Westminster's priority list.

We cannot allow that to continue. That is why I, as other members have done, urge people who have interests in the fishing community in Scotland to vote yes in September, and to give us the power to truly represent them properly. A yes vote will mean that Scotland's representatives, who are closest to the needs of the Scottish fishing sector, will be able to ensure that the voice of Scottish fishing is properly heard in Europe.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Some of those issues were raised in the debate last week. Can Dave Thompson explain to me how the seven votes of an independent Scotland, which would be equivalent to the votes that Estonia has, would give more influence to Scottish fishing than the 29 votes that the UK has?

Dave Thompson: I do not think that the votes of the UK are very effective for us at the moment. We even had the example last week of Owen Paterson using the wrong speaking notes when representing Scotland on genetic modification. Is that the level of representation that we are content with? We would also get about double the number of votes that we have at the current time, because we would be an independent nation. We would make alliances with like-minded countries. I have absolutely no doubt but that Scotland would do far better with independence and that our fishing communities around our coasts would benefit greatly from it.

We have much to gain from independence because supporting our fishing communities and seafood sector will always be a priority for Scotland's Governments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should draw to a close please.

Dave Thompson: As an independent member state of the EU, Scotland will be negotiating as one of the most respected fishing nations in Europe. That will involve negotiating management of fishing opportunities and securing funding for diversification of economic opportunities in our coastal communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. You must close.

Dave Thompson: Yes, Presiding Officer. I shall close.

That, in turn, will have a beneficial effect on Scotland's successful food and drink sector by taking it from a strong financial position to an even stronger one.

15:14

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I am not quite sure how we have managed to get sidetracked down the avenue of constitutional considerations—

Richard Lochhead: Jamie McGrigor started it.

Liam McArthur: I am prepared to accept that, but we hit a new nadir with Dave Thompson's speech.

As Orkney's MSP, I should declare an interest as the son of an inshore fisherman. In fact, it was my father's determination to become an inshore fisherman that took us to Orkney in the first place. Dave Thompson referred to the dearth of small boats on the west coast of his constituency. I can assure him that one of my father's former boats is on the west coast of his constituency. Unfortunately, it is probably beyond the efforts of anyone to make it more profitable, sustainable and vibrant, as it sits at the bottom of Dunvegan bay.

Dave Thompson: Will the member take an intervention?

Liam McArthur: In a second, Mr Thompson.

I very much welcome the fact that we are having a debate on inshore fisheries, when the focus is normally on white-fish fisheries, the pelagic sector—not least because of the unacceptable efforts of Faroese and Icelandic fishermen in that fishery—or aquaculture. Those have tended to be the issues that dominate our fisheries debates, so I welcome the fact that the Government has brought a motion on inshore fisheries to the Parliament.

Dave Thompson: On a point of information, if I caught Mr McArthur correctly, he mentioned that I had said that there was a dearth of small fishing boats on the west coast. I do not think that I used that term; we have lots of small boats on the west coast.

Liam McArthur: I welcome that clarification.

I am happy to support the Government motion. The three strands that it identifies in relation to the inshore fisheries strategy are entirely valid. On the first of those—the improved evidence base—the cabinet secretary mentioned the Orkney lobster project, which is testimony to what can and should be done in that area. The other two strands are engagement with inshore fishermen and strengthened management through IFGs, which are entirely sensible approaches that I will touch on in more detail shortly.

The motion also talks about not just the economic but the cultural contribution that the inshore fisheries sector makes. That chimes with my experience in an Orkney context. The issue is not just about jobs, although, as Jamie McGrigor mentioned, in many of the most fragile communities the jobs tend to be located in the inshore fisheries sector; it is about the provision of income to households, without which it would be hard to sustain the populations in those communities. Work in an inshore fishery is often one of three or four different roles, all of which bring income into the household and the community.

As the cabinet secretary said, the sector is very diverse—it includes those who use static gear and those who use mobile gear—and it is subject to conflicts. I welcomed his restatement of the fact that the rights of both those parties need to be respected as we take forward the strategy for the inshore fisheries sector.

Much as I agree with everything that is in the Government motion, I think that the Labour amendment makes some helpful additions. It underscores the importance of the seafood supply chains and their localised nature, and it highlights

the need to raise public awareness of the benefits of domestic consumption, as well as the importance of the financial benefits that come from exports. To pick up on the point that Christian Allard fairly made about the need to stimulate demand, it is often the case that the demand and the awareness are there; it is securing the supply in local markets that is difficult. We need to look at how we can do that more effectively, working with the interests that our tourism sector has in that regard.

The Labour amendment also fairly makes a point about engagement with other marine stakeholders, to which I will return.

As colleagues might be aware, I am substituting for my colleague Tavish Scott, who is recovering from a minor operation last week. The debate would have benefited from his input, not just across the piece but specifically in relation to his experience with the Shetland regulating order that has been place for the best part of a decade. Tavish Scott was in the vanguard in making the case for that 10 or so years ago. It was a cogent and compelling case that was pursued persistently over a period of time and which was eventually accepted by my colleague Ross Finnie.

It struck me that the case for the Shetland regulating order was strongly grounded in local support—that was key to ensuring that it was delivered and that it was effective once it was in place. That has allowed for a more tailored approach in dealing with issues that may be common to other fisheries around the coasts and islands of Scotland, but that approach had to be seen to address significantly the issues of the various stakeholders in Shetland.

The approach has allowed Shetland to manage a process from a position of strength. It was not a demand for a regulating order to turn round a fishery that was on its knees; rather, it recognised that the fishery was pretty vibrant and successful, but that there were inherent risks if there was no framework for dealing with issues and settling disputes among the different stakeholders.

The Clyde is perhaps an example of where we are coming at the issue from a different angle. Claudia Beamish mentioned that we have a fishery there that deals only with scallops and nephrops, whereas previously quite a vibrant fin fishery existed.

I did not take part in Kenneth Gibson's debate, but I understand that it threw up a number of constructive ideas in addition to what emerged from the Clyde 2020 summit. I welcome the cabinet secretary's assurance that the messages emerging from that, including the case for a regulating order, will be considered.

The model could work elsewhere but that would require local buy-in. The model will cost. Fiona Matheson of the Orkney Fisheries Association made clear in an email to me that it is

“essential that IFGs are properly funded—local control costs money—Regulating Orders are expensive legal processes—needs to be money on the table to support this not just words!”

I am sure that that is not news to the minister or the cabinet secretary; nevertheless, it is a point worth bearing in mind.

How is this compatible with other marine environment users? It does not relate just to those with the static or the mobile gear; others, too, come into potential conflict with the interests of inshore fisheries. I do not necessarily accept that aquaculture and inshore fisheries cannot co-exist. However, care is needed to manage the situation, appropriate siting decisions need to be taken and environmental standards must remain high with rigorous scientific evidence underpinning them. That can be achieved, even if careful and sensitive management is required.

Like others, I pay tribute to the importance of the inshore fisheries sector. It has the Heineken effect—other beers are available—of delivering jobs and income in parts of the country that would otherwise struggle. There are opportunities to improve the profitability, sustainability and vibrancy of the sector and I am committed to lending those efforts my support and that of my party, and not just because that will make an old man at the north end of Sanday very happy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have used up much of the time that we had available, so I must limit members to speeches of up to seven minutes, please. I call Rhoda Grant, to be followed by Graeme Dey.

15:23

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I wonder why it taken us so long to debate inshore fisheries. That creates the impression that inshore fisheries are not important, which is emphasised by the Government's policy being set out in a press release, issued on 27 January 2012. I had hoped that the debate would signal a change in emphasis, but when I heard Dave Thompson using up most of his speech to talk about the referendum rather than the needs of those who fish the inshore waters in his constituency, I wondered whether that was the case. *[Interruption.]* If the cabinet secretary will listen, I can explain why.

Inshore fisheries are fundamentally important not only to those who fish, but to the communities that they support. They create jobs in those communities, not only in fishing but in support

services. Those who fish support those communities by spending their earnings in local shops; their children go to local schools and their money remains in the communities, which makes them sustainable.

Larger fishing vessels provide income to the major ports and to the Scottish economy as a whole, but in general they do not create sustainable rural development in the way that inshore fisheries do. Despite that, larger vessels can pick and choose where they fish and this Government always gives them priority.

The west coast prawn fishery was opened up as a free for all by the Scottish Government without a thought about the impact on local inshore vessels. The quota was swept up in a matter of months. The large boats moved on, and local families—not just the people who were directly involved in fishing but those in the processing sector and support services—faced a grim future. The Scottish Government intervened, albeit at the last minute, to ensure that some inshore fishing could take place. However, that had an impact on the income of those in the inshore fishery who were not able to move on to fishing grounds, as well as that of processors in the area, who depend on all boats landing catch and who could no longer pursue catch at their local ports for processing.

The approach appeared to portray a lack of knowledge and understanding of the whole fishery. I hope that the Scottish Government ensures that it never repeats that mistake.

Dennis Robertson: The member referred to the Scottish Government's understanding of the fishing industry. Can she explain Westminster's understanding of the fishing industry, given that Westminster has sold the industry down the river?

Rhoda Grant: I think that that intervention demonstrates what I said about the Scottish National Party. The party is very concerned about the constitutional settlement but shows no concern whatever for the people. Scotland is on pause, and it appears that the inshore fishery is also on pause, because the SNP is doing nothing with the powers that it has to protect the sector.

We need areas to be under very local management. That is nothing new; for some years I have been asking the cabinet secretary to ensure that local fishers have the power to work together to manage their fishery. Members received a briefing from the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust. What the trust is proposing for the Firth of Clyde is nothing new and has happened elsewhere.

For example, the Loch Torridon fishery was closed to mobile-gear boats. That was largely due to the work of Liz Pritchard, when she was secretary of the local community council. Liz

passed away a few weeks ago. She was widely recognised for her work on rural health but was perhaps not as widely recognised for her work on local fisheries, although she was instrumental in getting the fishery closed to mobile-gear boats because historically there had been conflict between mobile-gear boats and static-gear boats.

The protection that the local community was given enabled it to take steps to conserve the fishery. However, if it was to realise the full conservation potential, for the community and for future generations in fishing, it needed to be able to ensure that all fishing in the area complied with the approach that it had set out. The protection from mobile gear that was given to static-gear boats in Loch Torridon created the potential for boats from other areas and communities to be encouraged into the fishery, and not all boats comply with the community's requirements in relation to conservation. The community has asked for a regulating order, so that it can properly manage the fishery and ensure that all who fish in the loch comply with the regulations. Such communities need to be given the management role and the tools to ensure that everyone complies with the safeguards.

We need areas to be protected from mobile-gear boats so that static-gear boats can fish unhindered, so we need the approach in Loch Torridon to be applied in other areas. There must also be management of mobile-gear boats, to ensure that all, from the boats that leave port every day to those that go to sea for long periods, have access to a sustainable industry. That might be a debate for another day.

Inshore fishing is about not just the jobs in the fishery itself but small communities and the people who back up the fishery. The sector needs to sustain the people who are involved in fish processing, the people who transport fish to larger suppliers, the people who supply boats with the equipment that they need and the people who work in the industry onshore, as well as the communities that such people's income supports.

We must consider the needs of the hospitality industry and ensure that more produce is kept at home. We all want to sample the local fish when we go abroad, and it is important that visitors to Scotland do the same. Keeping produce at home boosts local tourism industries and local markets in Scotland and our coastal communities. We need to harvest our seas in the same way that we harvest our land. We need fish, which is essential for a healthy diet, but if we just have a free-for-all, no one will win and we will end up with no fish for future generations.

Inshore fisheries that are protected by regulating orders allow us the opportunity to manage them not only in sustaining our communities, but in

sustaining our fisheries. Communities depend on those fisheries.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I give my apologies to Rob Gibson and other members for not calling him before Rhoda Grant. I now call Rob Gibson, to be followed by Graeme Dey.

15:30

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I am delighted to take part in this debate on inshore fisheries. I want to concentrate on the things that we probably all agree on, and to emphasise some points therein.

Last week's news in the *John O'Groat Journal* provided more than the wrapping paper for this week's fish suppers. It reported that the proprietor of the Captain's Galley seafood restaurant in Scrabster, Jim Cowie, received the National Federation of Fish Friers fish and chip quality award. Only the top 3 per cent of fish restaurants in Britain receive that prestigious award, which requires all the back-up of the organisation for the people who gain it. I congratulate Jim Cowie, whom the *John O'Groat Journal* reported as saying:

"One of the most important ingredients in the success of the Captain's Galley is in our longstanding relationships with fishermen."

That encapsulates the way in which people onshore and fishermen work—how the processors, restaurants and consumers want to see that approach. It is an example that many other areas should be able to, and possibly do, take up. I congratulate Jim Cowie and his team.

This debate at Holyrood shows that we agree across the parties on the importance of Scotland's inshore fisheries and that the Scottish Government is taking forward a number of measures that increase and support that, not least the creel support scheme after the terrible weather. We are reflecting a strategy that has the three main components of improving the evidence base for managing inshore fisheries; improving engagement with inshore fishermen; and strengthening management through the network of inshore fisheries groups. I will come to some of the details on those shortly. What Jim Cowie said about the long-standing relationship brings the whole story together.

I am a big fan of seafood. Those who know me think that I munch for Scotland on the subject. As I get around my constituency, I find many hotels and restaurants over and above the Captain's Galley that offer mouth-watering seafood meals. However, what concerns me more is the lack of everyday supplies for home consumption, as far too few families share my passion. I like hand-dived scallops, langoustines in their shells,

cracking crab claws and scooping out the meat from the legs and bodies of crustaceans. Oysters are ace—or not, as far too many people say, although they have not even tried them.

The ability to buy those things in our supermarkets, where people mostly do their shopping, is extremely limited. For those of us in Evanton and many other villages in the Highlands, Bell's fish van comes around. It does so on Tuesday mornings at 10 o'clock, so I always miss it, because I am in the Parliament. The array of shellfish and fin fish that are on sale in the back of that van would put all the supermarkets that I know of to shame. They are mainly the produce of inshore fishermen. What can be done in a small way should be able to be done in a far greater way if our whole population is to benefit from that fantastic source. Some 75 per cent of the Scottish fleet fished in the inshore areas in 2012.

There are too many subjects in the debate to discuss them in great detail, but I want to mention some of them. Liam McArthur has already mentioned a several order that has been in force in Shetland for 10 years. Can the cabinet secretary tell us what its successes are and what the lessons are for other people? At one point, Highland Council thought about trying to get a several order for the whole Highland coastline, which was not going to work. Now that we have inshore fishery groups set up in each area, it seems possible that the policing could be done on the basis of their working on such regulatory orders, and I am sure that members of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee would be delighted to take a cooks' tour of Scotland to see them all as they come through.

In my constituency, there are other issues that are worth talking about. I mentioned creel fishermen, and we have heard about the problems that have been caused by the loss of accreditation in Loch Torridon. There was an exclusion of trawlers, but too many people put down creels and the committee had to deal with the issue of how we can conserve the stock. One of the best suggestions yet is to follow in the footsteps of what has been done with lobsters. Where lobsters are creel caught, the females can be tail notched and allowed to go back to breed. We can also do that with creel-caught langoustine. I hope that that will make it possible for people to maintain and increase the stock.

There are other threats to the langoustine stocks in their burrows on sandy bottoms. In the east side of my constituency, in the inner Moray Firth, large tankers and other vessels are anchored outside the port areas. They do not pay the dues to go into the port because they are dear, but they are ripping up the bottoms of many

inshore fishery areas. I want us to tackle that problem, as it affects a lot of people who fish in my constituency and in neighbouring constituencies.

I hope that the Government's motion and the amendment that has been lodged by our friends in the Labour Party can be supported across the chamber. However, if we are to address some of the issues that affect inshore waters, we must have the powers and the money in our own hands. One issue that has not been mentioned yet is the Crown Estate. I suggest that, instead of its making imposts on local piers, harbours and moorings, it would be good if we were able to regulate those things ourselves directly. In the past, the Parliament has said that it wants the power to do that, but the matter has not been devolved by Westminster. It is important that we get our hands on that and many other issues so that we can make inshore fishing even more healthy than it is today.

15:37

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Thriving inshore fisheries do not just contribute to the success story that is Scottish food and drink; they also safeguard traditional skills for future generations. The port of Arbroath, which I represent, has seen considerable change over the past 40 years. Back in the 1970s, we had 59 traditional white-fish boats operating out of the town. Today there are none, yet the number of lobster boats has doubled from seven to 14 and I am told by those who know a good deal more than I do about these things that the current vessels are far bigger in size than their historical equivalents. Indeed, the number of vessels that are fishing locally for not just lobster but crabs, prawns and scallops has grown considerably over the past four decades, emphasising the importance of inshore fisheries to the Angus coastal communities.

It is encouraging to learn that there is sufficient confidence in the industry for fishermen to invest in brand new or good second-hand vessels and engine replacements and in new gear. That is encouraging not only because it safeguards directly related jobs at sea and ashore, but because it helps to maintain a steady stream of work for MacKay's boat yard, which the Presiding Officer visited when the Parliament came to Arbroath last year. MacKay's is unique in being the only yard—from the Borders all the way up to Peterhead—that caters for traditional wooden vessels. Its owner, Harry Simpson, is committed to ensuring that the skills that are required to carry out that work will remain alive through the operation of an apprenticeship programme that is financed in part by European fisheries funding and is delivered in conjunction with the fishing museum at Anstruther.

Arbroath's place in fishing folklore may be guaranteed by its connection with the smokie but, as I mentioned, the sad fact is that there is not a single white-fish boat sailing from the port these days. However, through the establishment of the marina and the aforementioned growth in the number of inshore boats, the harbour remains thriving. It was good to learn last week of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's decision to replace the local lifeboat with a new Shannon-class boat. We should never lose sight of the fact that going to sea, whether for work or pleasure, can be a dangerous business and requires appropriate rescue back-up. According to the station's operations manager, Alex Smith, the decision to provide Arbroath with the Shannon-class all-weather vessel was a recognition of the increase in the number of commercial and pleasure vessels operating in the waters served by Arbroath.

I confess that until prepping for this debate I had not quite realised the scale of the inshore fishing operation in wider Scotland or its economic contribution to the food and drink export market. Based on 2012 figures, 75 per cent of the Scottish fleet operates in the inshore area and in cash value terms the sector makes up around 18 per cent of the entire fishing catch in Scotland. Of course, the sector's economic contribution is far greater than simply the value of landings. I have already touched on the spend on gear and repairs, not to mention sustaining the processing and sales side of the product.

I am sure that the cabinet secretary will remember the visit that he and I made to RR Spink's factory in Arbroath a little over three years ago, not least because of the foodstuffs that we tasted on site and left with samples of. Of course, Arbroath also boasts a number of small-scale operations around the harbour that prove something of a magnet for visitors, including a number of MSPs who I know never miss the chance when passing through the town to pick up a smokie or two.

I agree with what Claudia Beamish's amendment says about the importance of promoting local supply chains and engaging with stakeholders, including conservation groups, to protect and enhance the natural inshore water environment for future generations. I am not convinced that we in Scotland entirely appreciate the wonderful seafood that comes from our waters or that as consumers we support it to the extent that we might. It is vital, as I think the Scottish Government by its actions has demonstrated, that all reasonable measures are taken to ensure that the fisheries are worked in a sustainable way. That is in everyone's interests, not least that of fishermen. It is right that the Government's inshore

fisheries strategy continues to be focused on the three components that Rob Gibson mentioned.

Liam McArthur: Graeme Dey's points are entirely valid. Does he agree that where there are very small businesses—that is, in effect, what many of the small boats are—acting in a co-operative fashion can deliver a wider benefit and secure the added market value that can be got from, for example, Marine Conservation Society accreditation, as in the case of the Orkney Fishermen's Society?

Graeme Dey: That is a valid point. When reading the report of the 2013 inshore fisheries conference—I understand that the report of the 2014 conference is due to be released any day now—I was struck by both the number and the range of participating stakeholders and by some of the summary comments, which indicated clearly that those taking part generally bought into the direction of travel. However, as the cabinet secretary acknowledged earlier, not everything is sweetness and light in the sector, particularly in relation to the conflict between creel and trawl fishing.

Of course, it helps that the Scottish Government has demonstrated its support for the industry with hard cash. We are two years into a three-year £750,000 funding package backing the strategy, which has seen the original IFG structure expanded to cover the entire mainland coastline. Two months ago, the cabinet secretary launched a £400,000 Scottish creel support fund to assist those fishermen whose livelihoods have been adversely affected by exceptionally bad weather. That of course followed the setting up of a fund in 2013 to assist prawn fishermen. We should acknowledge that there is genuine partnership working going on.

Having mentioned the opportunity that exists to develop domestic markets, especially local ones, I will conclude on the export situation for Scottish seafood in general. Scotland's seafood already makes its way to 100 countries around the globe, with our salmon alone reaching 60 countries. In addition, two thirds of the world's langoustines are sourced in Scotland. The combined food and drink sector overseen by the cabinet secretary has come a long way. It is up from £3.7 billion in 2007 to £5.3 billion in 2012 and has already smashed the 2017 target of £5.1 billion. Now, we have a new target of £7.1 billion to reach three years from now.

It must be recognised that whisky accounts for 80 per cent of that export activity. The other export participants must strive for a better balance in that regard. To be fair, fishing is doing its bit. Fish exports increased by £198 million between 2007 and 2011, and turnover in the fishing and aquaculture sector went up by 12.8 per cent in the

three years to 2011. There are opportunities to build on that, such as the market in China, where annual seafood consumption rose from 11.5kg per head in 1990 to 25.4kg per head in 2004 and it is predicted that by 2020 that figure will have risen to 35.9kg. That is, without a doubt, an opening for Scotland's fishing and aquaculture sector.

15:44

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, because inshore fishing is vital to the Scottish economy. The sector was worth £87 million to the economy in 2012 and it exports produce around the world. Inshore fishing also helps to sustain employment in fragile communities.

The Scottish inshore fishing sector accounts for 75 per cent of the Scottish fleet and, thanks to devolution, the Scottish ministers are responsible for regulating sea fishing around Scotland and within 12 nautical miles of Scotland's coast. It is an industry not only that we control but which is vital and profitable to the Scottish economy.

We must ensure that sustainability is at the heart of our inshore fisheries policy, as organisations such as RSPB Scotland, the Marine Conservation Society and the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust say. With that in mind, I will focus on sustainability issues for most of my speech. I will discuss the Community of Arran Seabed Trust, also known as COAST, which is based on the Isle of Arran, and I will look at the aims and objectives of the Clyde 2020 initiative.

In the past, according to SIFT,

"Over-fishing and the use of fishing gears which damage habitats have not only been permitted but promoted ... the inshore ecosystem has been degraded and the valuable fin-fish stocks have collapsed ... coastal communities no longer enjoy a mixed and vibrant economy."

The effects of bad and unsustainable management are apparent in the region that I represent, where the Firth of Clyde has suffered serious economic and ecological losses since towed fishing gears were allowed. Now, more than 90 per cent of the catch comes from just two species—scallops and nephrops—rather than the variety of species that used to exist in the Clyde.

During a visit to Arran, I had a meeting with COAST at which I heard about the damage that dredging had done to the sea bed and the marine environment. That led COAST to campaign for not only a marine protected area but a no-take zone. The no-take zone was established in 2008 and was the first of its kind in Scotland. Its intention was to not only protect but improve biodiversity in the area.

The benefits of the no-take zone extend beyond the zone and help to enhance sustainable

fisheries, as the zone allows fish in the area to produce up to 100 times more eggs. The zone's effects are evident and, although it alone cannot support recovery of the Clyde, it has produced several benefits over the past five years.

The University of York undertook monitoring of the no-take zone and it found not only that scallop density was increasing around the zone but that it allowed populations to extend and enter a more natural state. The scallops were found to be larger than those elsewhere, and the density of lobster populations was found to be increasing around the zone. That led the university to conclude that

"protected areas can be a useful tool in ecosystem-based fishery management and that, by providing fishery and ecological benefits, they can allow seafloor habitats to recover whilst safeguarding the long-term sustainability of commercially important shellfish stocks."

Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether he is looking to establish further no-take zones in strategic areas in the Firth of Clyde or elsewhere? What is being done to address the small scale and lack of flexibility of no-take zones?

SIFT has proposed a more flexible plan for the sustainable management of Scotland's inshore waters. Wider use of regulating orders would allow fishing to continue, but in a managed and sustainable way. Management through regulating orders should be local and flexible while adopting an evidence-based approach; that would allow all types of fishing to continue but would enable an independent management organisation to react quickly and adapt appropriately to changes in stocks and habitats. The proposals for establishing a regulating order in the Clyde are still in the planning stages, but will the Scottish Government consider establishing an order to bring the Clyde back up to good environmental status as part of the target under the European Union marine directive to achieve healthy oceans and seas by 2020?

Inshore fishing is vital to Scotland's economy and it is the life-blood of many of our coastal communities. However, through mismanagement, the diversity of fishing stocks has been destroyed. We must ensure that sustainability is at the heart of our inshore fisheries policy. No-take zones are a useful tool, but more needs to be done to reverse the damage and we need to adopt a more science-based approach to management.

By placing proper sustainable fishing management at the heart of our policy, we can allow habitats to rebuild and diversity to increase. That will increase the socioeconomic benefits to coastal communities as well as bolstering Scotland's wider economy by breathing new life into this vital sector.

15:51

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The most interesting speech so far has come from Rob Gibson, who illustrated a general point when he said that female langoustines should have their tails clipped and be thrown back but the males should be culled because they are utterly dispensable. I heard in his voice the influence of my wife, who says, "You men; you're all useless." The same is obviously true in the shellfish sector. One male shellfish in an area might be enough; the rest we can eat. If only conservation was so simple, but it absolutely is not.

Of course, the hunter gatherers that are represented in our inshore and offshore fishing communities are, par excellence, the conservationists who are most committed to ensuring that there is a future for fishermen and, through that, for their communities. Sons and daughters of fishermen will have a future in their communities only if today's fishermen and the rules that Government surrounds our industry with promote sustainability. When we see other species prospering, we know that the stocks of food that they depend on are doing well, and therefore that there are stocks for our fishermen. There is no future for the communities around our coastline unless our inshore fishing succeeds.

Of necessity, we all have to eat in order to live, and fish and all the products of the sea are a great part of that. On Saturday, I was at a 92nd birthday party in the community cafe in Strichen, not too far from the sea, and I had the most wonderful huge, plump, tasty, well-prepared haddock. However, the inshore fisheries are delivering a great deal as well. I navigate my way round Scotland by thinking where I first tasted various foods. I had my first razor clams in Harris and I first tasted a scallop in Oban. I am sure that we can all think about places in that way. I first ate a fleukie at Achmelvich in Sutherland. I speared it with my own little bit of fence wire with a bit of string tied on to a cane, by standing on it, and then took it back to be cooked that night. I was a tourist inshore fisherman.

There are other species that have not been mentioned in the debate. Eels and elvers would be an example. They are absolutely wonderful additions to our food stocks, as are mackerel. I have fished for mackerel, standing on the shore and seeing the sea bubbling with sprats and knowing that the mackerel would be there behind them. With just a few barbed hooks on the end of the line and a bit of silver paper attached to each hook, I could bring out six mackerel with a single cast by throwing it into the mêlée.

However, our inshore fishermen and the industry fish in a more complex and properly regulated environment, not just that of the casual

tourist. Rhoda Grant talked about the links between our industry, the provision of local products and the sustaining of local food-based industries, including our hotels and restaurants, and she is absolutely right. That is what brings people to our communities—local food delivered from local inshore fisheries. It is therefore important that we have a regulatory structure that supports that.

The Government did a particularly important thing in December 2013, when we brought into force a new regulation that protects the waters that are essential for good inshore stocks. At the end of the day, the bottom of the food chain, which creates food for others, is often made up of filter feeders that need good, pure water to prosper, and mud that has within it a good biological load that has not been contaminated by industrial pollution or sewage. The regulation that was introduced was the first in the UK. It replaced the European shellfish waters directive and was an important part of what our Government has been doing.

On the motion and the amendment that are before us, I will pick from the Labour amendment first. It recognises the vital role of inshore fisheries to local economies. Ye cannae possibly disagree with that; it is self-evidently correct. They make an economic and cultural contribution because when our communities are economically vibrant, they are also culturally vibrant.

In my final 90 seconds, I want to talk about one or two other things. We have not heard much about the mussels, winkles, and cockles that can also be gathered on our shores. For that matter, some Scottish products can augment things. Traditionally, top-notch lobsters would be cooked in champagne. I will propose something even better, which is silver birch wine from Highland Wineries. It is pétillant, if not quite as fizzy as champagne.

Jamie McGrigor rose—

Stewart Stevenson: I do not have time, Jamie. I beg your pardon.

At £10 a bottle, it is half the price of a cheap bottle of champagne and it has local flavour that is absolutely terrific.

We all have local good practice. The village of Whitehills has the nearest really good fish and chip shop to me, and the shop has its own trawler. The fish are landed so close to the shop that the chef could go on his bicycle and bring them from the boat to the shop. That is the kind of thing that sustains communities and delivers for tourists.

Eating fish is enjoyable on the palate, but Bertie Wooster's man Jeeves used to go away and eat fish because, as his master said, that equipped his

brains to engage with the problems that Bertie Wooster faced. Let us all eat a bit more fish. The quality of parliamentary debate would surely benefit.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I call Angus MacDonald to be followed by Jayne Baxter.

15:58

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): Right on cue, Presiding Officer.

From the contributions that we have already heard this afternoon, there is no doubt that the inshore fishing industry has experienced some difficult times recently. However, it is encouraging to see the Scottish Government and Marine Scotland responding positively to the challenges that are being faced. We have seen the recent formation of IFMAC and the annual Scottish inshore fisheries conference, which is allowing the industry to engage with the Government to ensure that everyone works towards more profitable and sustainable inshore fisheries. With the roll-out of regionalisation, which is extremely welcome, the input of those groups will become increasingly important as local management plans are developed with inshore fisheries groups.

In the past year, for example, we have seen significant assistance, including a creel support fund, to aid fishing vessels that suffered from reduced catches and loss of gear last winter; and last summer, funds were established for white fish and prawn fishermen. In addition to the challenges, many positives result from the industry, with inshore fishermen supporting fragile local communities right around our coast with fuel-efficient fishing methods and the lowest discards in the industry.

The formation of the inshore fisheries groups has resulted in a number of welcome local initiatives, and others are in the pipeline. The cabinet secretary referred to a number of them in his opening speech, including the development and study of lobster habitats in Orkney, a survey of cockle stocks in the Western Isles, and a project to introduce V-catching and escape panels in creels in the south-west.

I am closely monitoring one such initiative: the fishing industry science alliance spurdog project, which is run jointly with the Scottish Association for Marine Science, Barratlantic in Barra and Islander Shellfish in Stornoway. I declare a non-pecuniary interest, as one of my cousins is the owner of Islander Shellfish.

The project on the proliferation of spurdog—or dogfish—in the waters around the outer Hebrides has been established in response to calls from a

number of representatives of the west coast inshore fisheries who seek to achieve a healthy fishing industry and a significant reduction in discards.

Local discussion with skippers and processors identified the project, because vessels that trawl for nephrops in the Minch occasionally catch quantities of spurdog—mainly male—from October to December in particular. Although skippers try to avoid catching spurdog—in fact, they go out of their way to avoid dogfish and travel to another area to fish—catches are at times unavoidable because of the patchy distribution of the fish.

Those catches are currently discarded, and the fish will be mostly dead. The local industry is concerned about the loss of income from the bycatch fishery, which seems to be contrary to European initiatives that are aimed at eliminating discards; about the considerable scientific uncertainty in relation to spurdog; and about discard rates becoming worse if spurdog stocks rebuild, which seems to be the case. It is hoped that the research will confirm what Western Isles fisherman believe: that there are much more dogfish out there than is currently officially recognised.

The industry would also like to know how a sustainable bycatch fishery would be permitted to reopen if the scientific monitoring of the spurdog stocks is insufficient to demonstrate recovery. The industry is therefore delighted that collaborative research into spurdog biology and improving the stock assessments is now under way.

There is concern in the industry that at present no landing is allowed for spurdog, although it previously represented a valuable bycatch for the nephrops trawl sector fishing in the Minch area at certain times of the year. According to local fishers, the majority of the fish that are caught at this time of year are small males, and patches of the fish are encountered occasionally and are hard to avoid. Because the spurdog become entangled in the nets, the fishers normally move away and try to avoid such encounters, but they object to having to discard a saleable product.

Discussions with the fishers elicited a range of opinions on whether discarded spurdog survive, but there appear to be no scientific studies that have examined the survival of spurdog from nephrops trawl hauls specifically. The aims of the present project are to collect new data on the levels and locations of spurdog bycatch and to collect biological information on the sizes and sex of the fish that are caught in the Minch area in order to inform the debate on whether a controlled incidental bycatch fishery could be considered. The project has been funded to run over last winter and this winter.

Six vessels fishing from Barra and Stornoway volunteered to take part in the project by collecting samples and recording their bycatches, and additional vessels agreed to make their landings returns available to the Stornoway fisheries office. We await with interest the outcome of the research, which will, it is hoped, result in the non-targeted bycatch of dogfish being allowed to be landed. That will give local fishermen a top-up income in the difficult winter months.

In addition to the dogfish issue, another success story is the Scottish Government and Marine Scotland's decision to allow squid fishing in the Minch, which has helped the industry in the Western Isles. For the first time in a number of years, squid has been caught off the Western Isles—the first squid was caught last November—and is being sold locally and exported to France.

Squid is mainly winter fishing in the north Minch; the boats can now target it with a proper squid net and it does not affect their days at sea, which is a plus for everyone.

Until recently, fishermen were prohibited from catching squid west of Scrabster under the west of Scotland cod recovery measures, but the restrictions have now been relaxed, which is giving the local fishing industry a much-needed boost.

In August, the Scottish Government relaxed rules to allow vessels to notify Marine Scotland if they are going to fish for squid, following lobbying from local processors and fishermen. It is encouraging to note that, by using the specialised squid nets, the fishermen are landing clean catches and there is no—or very little—bycatch.

There is a great deal of potential for developing squid fishing in the Western Isles. Although it is clearly still at a very early stage, squid could become very important to the local fleet.

Many aspects of inshore fishing merit debate in the chamber, including MPAs, regionalisation and gear conflict issues. However, as always, time gets the better of us, even with a full afternoon's debate. I am sure that at least we can all welcome the fact that, with regionalisation, the industry and the Scottish Government will have much more influence on local policy. We look forward to it being rolled out in future.

16:05

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): We have heard from the cabinet secretary and others about the three main objectives of the Government's inshore fisheries strategy. I am sure that those who work in the industry or whose livelihoods and communities are bound up with fishing will welcome the renewed attention on the sector. We know that the continued

implementation and roll-out of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 will have an impact on inshore fisheries around the coast of Scotland and that the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013, although it focused primarily on fish farming and fishing rights, included a section on increasing the powers to tackle illegal cockling.

For many coastal communities, fishing is still a hugely important way of life. I am pleased that the motion recognises the value of fishing communities to the local and national economies. However, the industry is not what it once was. Although volume remained fairly steady in 2013, there was a sizeable decrease in the value of the catch landed compared with in the previous year, which has been referred to. The reality of the statistics that are published annually is demonstrated in the communities around the coast of Scotland. Along the coastline of the Mid Scotland and Fife region, the number of boats that are based in the picturesque villages around the east neuk of Fife has sadly declined over the years and the heaps of creel pots along the harboursides of Crail, Anstruther and Pittenweem have reduced, too.

While I am on the fishing villages of Fife, I should say that I am pleased that the Scottish Government's motion rightly recognises the cultural contribution that the fishing industry makes to Scotland. Fishing is a vital and vibrant part of our heritage, whether expressed through music, song or even dress, and the east neuk is home to the excellent Scottish fisheries museum in Anstruther. I recommend that everyone takes the time to visit the centre, which provides a wonderful insight into the industry's past while acknowledging the changes that have continued to shape the coastal communities that retain their links to fishing.

On the subject of heritage and historical environments, I should mention May island, which lies at the entrance to the Firth of Forth and is surrounded by prolific fishing grounds. According to the Scottish Natural Heritage website, those grounds have supported human settlers for about 8,000 years. May island is also home to Scotland's first lighthouse, which was built in 1636 and which used coal that had to be transported to the island. If members want to have a closer look, they can take a boat trip from North Berwick or Anstruther—I can recommend an afternoon on the island.

Coastal communities on both sides of the Forth are diversifying around their fishing heritage and natural resources. We see an increase in visitor attractions, places to stay and opportunities to sample the excellent food and drink, which is of the highest quality. People can get an award-winning fish supper in Anstruther. All that is important for the local economy, given that it is

estimated that just a few hundred people remain employed in the east coast inshore fisheries area.

Times can be tough for the fishermen who still go out in the waters off our coasts, so I am sure that measures such as the Scottish creel support fund, which the Scottish Government announced in February, will be welcomed. We should not forget that the fishing boats that are moored in harbours around Scotland and which give such character to the coast, and doubtless great pleasure to tourists and visitors alike, are also vital small businesses. That is why it is vital that the support that is provided to the industry comes not just from the Government at the centre; local authorities, working in partnership with fishing industry representatives, are essential in providing support to the sector.

In just one example, Fife Council recently re-established the Fife fisheries development fund, which exists to provide small grants to eligible fishery businesses. Such businesses can bid for funds of up to 50 per cent of the costs of making improvements in a range of areas, from capital investment in equipment or engines to staff training. Such support needs to be replicated across the country, and conferences such as the recent event that Marine Scotland organised in February this year are to be welcomed, as they enable the sector to engage effectively with the management of Scotland's inshore fisheries.

The Scottish Government's strategy for inshore fisheries revolves around the inshore fisheries group network, and I note that the east Scotland group, which includes the Mid Scotland and Fife region's coastline, has met on a fairly regular basis since 2013.

I was pleased to see that, within that time frame, the vital balancing act of marine life management, between conservation and fishing, appears to have been considered. An early meeting of the group considered the challenges of discard policy for small prawns and, earlier this year, the group was given a report scoping the opportunities for commercial fishing by surveying the bivalve mollusc population of St Andrews bay.

Precisely because of that balance between preserving marine life for future generations and sustaining livelihoods in the present, it is vital that the voices of the inshore fisheries groups are heard within the process as the national marine plan is established and the Scottish marine region planning partnerships begin to work.

My colleague Claudia Beamish articulated Scottish Labour's concerns about the roll-out of the national marine plan. I support her in that, as it is vital that all the sectors with an interest in Scotland's marine environment and planning framework—not just the inshore fishing industry—

are kept informed about the strategy for the growth of marine industries and the safeguarding of Scotland's environmental resources.

16:11

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

At 7,330 miles, Scotland's coastline is longer than that of most countries of the world, including—surprisingly enough—Italy and Denmark. The exact length is a moot point because of the coastline paradox but the point is that, whatever way we look at it, with an extremely rugged silhouette featuring inlets, coves, peninsulas and around 800 islands, the Scottish coastline is deceptively long and accounts for well over half of the United Kingdom coastline.

That is important because the vast extent of our coastline demonstrates how important the fishing industry is to Scotland at a national level and to local communities. Inshore fishing supports, at least in part, around 75 per cent of the Scottish fleet and has a catch value of around £90 million annually. That £90 million is not small beer and, when it is split between local communities, it is a potential goldmine. However, the real value of inshore fishing is the fact that the industry provides livelihoods for thousands of people in some of the most remote and rural parts of Scotland and, with that, sustains the economic wellbeing of the areas in which they live.

Sadly, the position in North East Fife is one of declining returns. For example, between 2007 and 2011, fishing vessels took 1,000 fewer voyages, resulting in reduced catch quantity. Thankfully, there was only a slight reduction in monetary intake in that period, but the Scottish fishing industry as a whole has taken a battering in recent times.

There are many reasons why that is the case. Partly, it is because of declining stocks due to poor management at an EU level, partly because of natural environmental changes—including bad weather in recent years—and partly because of huge structural change in the economy. Some boats in Pittenweem suffered as a result of every one of those factors, but I am delighted that the Scottish Government is working to assist in a number of ways, to which I shall come shortly.

We cannot afford to lose inshore fishing, and the Scottish Government is right to take steps to strengthen and support the industry for the years ahead. The legislation that guides our approach—the Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Act 1984—is now 30 years old. However, Richard Lochhead announced the updated inshore fisheries strategy two years ago. That strategy continues to adapt and develop according to need through the work of the regional inshore fisheries groups, which the

Scottish Government supports through substantial investment.

Part of the Scottish Government's renewed commitment, through its agency Marine Scotland, was to hold a national conference on inshore fishing. This year's conference took place on 28 March in Perth. I was pleased that the cabinet secretary was able to make a positive contribution to that conference.

The inshore fishing industry is fragile and, when things go wrong, we need to be able to respond flexibly. It is no exaggeration to say that the Scottish Government's support has been crucial in allowing some east neuk vessels to remain at sea.

Particularly in North East Fife, inshore fisheries are dependent on small fishing vessels. There is real concern that the triple whammy of the worst fishing year in the past 45 years in 2012, an inability to fish on the west coast and overfishing of local waters by visiting north-east of Scotland vessels has taken its toll. I understand that discussions are continuing on a no-take zone for north-east of Scotland vessels and am pleased that, at least as far as 2013 is concerned, there has been no migration of north-east Scotland vessels into the Forth estuary. However, it is clear that, compared with larger vessels, smaller vessels may not benefit from sufficient assistance to help them to recover.

I am also delighted that the Scottish Government has taken action to help, via the creel support fund, even though I know that, as far as some of my constituents are concerned, the £20,000 limit poses difficulties. I certainly hope to see further co-operation with and assistance for smaller vessels.

We also need to take environmental measures, such as the protection of the seabed to preserve shellfish growing areas. In that regard, as I see it, Scotland is leading the UK.

For the inshore fishing industry to retain and grow its value, we need to ensure that branding is working. Accordingly, I welcome the Scottish Government's support—including financial support of £700,000 for implementation—for the Scottish Seafood Partnership's action plan, which seeks, among other things, to reinforce Scottish seafood as a quality brand.

Jamie McGrigor: In talking about seafood as a special Scottish product, does the member agree that seafood cabins—such as the one on Oban pier and the one in Skipness in Argyll—have become popular and give people the chance to eat seafood at a reasonable price, rather than at the more expensive prices that tend to be charged in high-class restaurants?

Roderick Campbell: I agree that eating seafood at a reasonable price is always to be recommended. However, that is not to detract from the many high-class seafood restaurants in Scotland, some of which are in my constituency.

I hope that the action plan will complement the food and drink export plan, so that Scottish seafood produce can continue to be sold in increasing quantities in Europe, America and the rest of the world.

We know that Scottish seafood is up there with the best in the world, and we need to ensure that everyone else knows that, too. As Jayne Baxter has already mentioned, it would be remiss of any visitor to the east neuk of Fife not to try some of the local catches.

It is worth thinking about what we can do as a nation to improve our inshore fishing industry. The fact remains that Scotland accounts for 87 per cent of total UK fish landings, but receives only 41 per cent of the UK's allocation of European fisheries funding. It is and will remain a priority for any independent Scottish Government. However, as the First Minister said in Bruges yesterday, the Scottish Government is only sometimes consulted by UK ministers who speak on our behalf. That is just not good enough. I believe that, with independence, Scotland will be able to negotiate directly for Scottish priorities.

To Claire Baker, I would simply say that seven votes exercised by a Government that is making fishing a priority—albeit in negotiations with other countries, to ensure maximum influence—might just be better than 29 votes exercised by a lackadaisical Government.

16:17

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): As colleagues have said, the European common fisheries policy tends to attract the most attention, so I welcome the fact that, today, we have a chance to debate the fishing industry that is closer to home, in terms both of proximity and responsibility.

I hope that the Scottish Government can be responsive to the opportunities and challenges ahead. I know that things are starting to move in a much-needed positive direction. Regional fishing assemblies are happening; the long-overdue scallop fishing review has been commissioned to reform one of the most destructive dredging practices; and MPAs will be designated in a couple of months to protect what is left of unique and vital habitats. I share Claudia Beamish's view that we should protect and enhance these habitats. Christian Allard expressed concern that Claudia Beamish had perhaps focused too much on conservation. However, I know that he has a

great deal of expertise in this area and would agree that, without conservation, there is no industry, and that this is not an either/or debate.

We have to get the balance right by ensuring that we have inshore fisheries groups that are fairly constituted, with a range of stakeholders on board. As Liam McArthur pointed out, they have to be properly funded, too. We only have to look at the positive impact of Arran's COAST group to demonstrate the positive impact that such groups can have.

The speeches at the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust's parliamentary reception struck a chord with me. I listened to Nick Ferguson, the chairman of SIFT's advisory group, describing the collapse of the Firth of Clyde fisheries from sustained overexploitation.

He described how the collapse of angling, tourism and fishing had depopulated the towns and villages around the Firth of Clyde. He told us that 28 boats used to go out every day from his home village but that today, there are only two or three. Ten or so boats would be out fishing for recreation every evening in the kyles, whereas now he might see one if he is lucky.

The Clyde used to play host to the biggest sea angling competition in Europe but that has not happened for the past 25 years or so. The competition would attract fishermen and tourists, and created a need for accommodation—for local bed and breakfasts. These days, the Clyde is described as

“a fishery of last resort.”

The situation is bad but SIFT and others believe that it is redeemable and that it is possible to achieve good environmental status in the Clyde. We must learn from the mistakes of the past. When one stock was depleted, we just moved on to another. Herring fisheries became cod, plaice and sole fisheries. The fin-fish ecology has now collapsed, too, and there is a vast overdependence on shellfish. Bit by bit, politicians removed what protection there was and opened up previously protected parts of the Clyde when the unprotected parts were fished out. Incredibly, in 1984, a ban on trawling within 3 nautical miles of the shore was lifted.

The marine protected areas to be finalised over the next couple of months and the Clyde 2020 plan give us an opportunity to do things differently in the IFG areas. We need the right framework of protections and leadership from local people, local businessmen and a range of stakeholders who live in and understand the areas concerned and who also understand the vast potential that exists for jobs to be created in recreational angling and tourism.

What struck me about the SIFT recovery plan is that it is classic, practical green thinking. It involves local control of resources and is based on a clear understanding that sustaining a healthy environment is the foundation that is needed for a healthy economy, for jobs, for people's wellbeing and for the wellbeing of the seas that sustain them. Speaking of wellbeing, we know that fish is very good for us. In his contribution, Rob Gibson exploded the myth of supermarket choice. He finds more choice in a wee travelling fish van than he would in his local supermarket. I would like to get the chance to visit that fish van one day.

The motion today refers to a strategy, but I am afraid that I cannot quite find it. Government officials pointed me towards a press release from 2012. If that is actually where we are, there is serious work to do. I do not doubt for a minute that there is work going on, but if it is all behind the scenes, the Government is failing us on accountability. I would appreciate it if the cabinet secretary would share that progress with us as soon as possible.

When I browsed the management plans for the IFGs, one theme that emerged quite strongly was the lack of data and any kind of quality baseline information on the health of most fish stocks. That sort of information is absolutely crucial to any attempt at sustainable management. I therefore urge the cabinet secretary, in closing, to clarify exactly what he is referring to in the motion as a strategy, how he will ensure that a broad range of stakeholders are included in IFG decisions and how the Government intends to address those important gaps in scientific knowledge of our seas.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

Before I call our final speaker, I remind Parliament that all those who have participated in the debate should return to the chamber for closing speeches.

16:23

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):

Coming, as I think I do, 16th in the debate, I wonder whether there is anything that I can usefully contribute. However, I find one or two things that I can reflect on, and indeed one or two new things that I can say.

In the cabinet secretary's opening comments, he mentioned the £400,000 fund to ease the financial pressures for people in the creeling business, but he made the point that he would much rather put his money into the longer term. That is a point that has been pretty much reflected around the chamber: we see fishing—inshore and offshore in deep water—as a long-term part of Scotland's economy, culture and life. It is therefore important that we do not take any short-term decisions that will jeopardise that.

I am also aware of the fact that the inshore fishery operates in what are by definition largely shallow waters, where there is also a lot of wildlife, especially cliff-based birds and seals, which have been mentioned and which also have interests in the fish that our fishermen might want to catch.

There are also pleasure boats, there are some hardy folk who go surfing, and there are numerous other waterborne activities, which we have somehow or other to fit into the mix and which need to be accommodated in getting the whole system right. That sends me back to the point that however we choose to manage our inshore waters, it needs to be a collective effort—an issue to which I will return.

I have a happy memory of inshore fishing in my constituency. Murray McBay & Co is a long-established business in Johnshaven, just up the coast in my constituency. I was just reflecting that, without such a business, a place such as Johnshaven would be a commuter village. I suspect that that is the experience of many of us in other places; I suspect that villages on the Fife coast would struggle to be much else. So, such businesses bring cultural significance and economic diversity.

To return to my happy memory, I am sorry that I did not know that I was going to speak in the debate, because otherwise I would have brought a photograph from home. The photograph, which was taken in 2011 by *The Courier* when I visited Murray McBay & Co, is of me, the First Minister and Ivar McBay, who runs the company. That would be a pretty good photo under any circumstances, but in the picture the First Minister is holding up a lobster and I have not seen a bigger beaming face on him. It is an absolutely fabulous photo—wonderful if one happens to be the local candidate and it is a few weeks before an election—and it sums up what that local industry is about and what fabulous products we have.

Graeme Dey referred to lifeboats, which are another part of the mix in coastal communities. He referred to the news that a Shannon class lifeboat will be going to Arbroath. I have to say that the first one is coming to Montrose. There are also other, smaller inshore boats based there and up the coast that I represent.

I bring to members' attention the Maggie Law maritime museum in Gourdon. Should members ever be in our part of the world, it would be a good place to visit. The museum celebrates in a place the size of a small garage an original inshore lifeboat with oars, which I understand rescued more than 100 folk in that fishing community over the years. The boat was paid for by the local community penny by penny, week by week. For me, that sums up the way that such communities used to work. It is an insight into the difficulties

that they faced. We have new technology and we need to enable those communities to be sustained.

Last, I want to pick up the bigger issue of climate change. I notice that one of the results that we are already seeing is that fish are moving around. I refer briefly to some information from the Marine Climate Change Impacts Partnership, which states:

“In the North Sea, a large number of coldwater species”—

such as cod and lemon sole—

“have deepened on average by 5.5m per decade. Conversely, some warm water species have moved to shallower water, such as sole (7.6m per decade).”

The consequence of that kind of movement is that the fish that were just round the head in shallow waters might no longer be there. The boat that one used in the past and some of the gear that one might want to use might no longer be appropriate because the stock has moved.

I echo the comment that Alison Johnstone, among others, made, which is that we need good science. As far as we can, we need to understand not just how healthy the stocks are, but where they are and what they are doing. The more marine biology we understand, the better the decisions that we will make.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the closing speeches.

16:30

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): In these increasingly tense political times, it is good to participate in a debate that proves that broad consensus can still come to the fore. I am happy to note that in the universal recognition across the chamber of the vital importance of the health and sustainability of Scotland's inshore waters and fisheries, such consensus seems broadly to have been achieved—with one or two notable exceptions.

Our inshore waters have, of course, long provided a rich source of wealth for our coastal communities. Over the years, they have yielded a diverse bounty, but we must recognise that over the past 50 or 60 years the pressures on those waters—which have been brought about largely by a combination of technological development and political decision making—have reached the stage at which a fresh look at their overall management is essential.

We welcome the broad thrust of the inshore fisheries strategy, with its three main components as identified in the motion. I particularly welcome the second of those components, which is the

commitment to improve engagement with inshore fishermen. If I may put on a parochial hat that I might not take off for the rest of my speech, I want to underline the importance of engaging with static gear fishermen, in particular.

In previous debates, I have referred to static gear fishermen as being akin to marine crofters. Theirs is not the world of big business, of massive investment in new technologies or of quotas and discards. Theirs is more the world of sustainable fishing, environmental enhancement and community benefit, but it is they who have probably been most disadvantaged over the past 50 or 60 years, particularly since—as many members have mentioned—the decision was taken to allow towed fishing gear back in to close inshore waters. The relatively stable balance that existed before that decision has been upset; it is right that we look at ways of redressing that balance, to the benefit of all interests in the sector.

To that end, I was very impressed by the reception and the subsequent members' business debate that was led by Kenny Gibson that highlighted the Clyde 2020 project, of which the principal aim is to restore the Clyde to "good environmental status". I suggest that the problems that are faced by, and the main aim of, that excellent project pretty well sum up the issues that need to be addressed through the strategy and further development of inshore fisheries management groups. The paramount strength of the structure of those groups is use of local knowledge in tailoring management of waters to specific local needs. Localism is not something that I am likely to argue with.

If the aim of restoring good environmental status really is to be a priority in the strategy—as it certainly should be—the Government must do more to support new technology in the sector. We cannot escape the fact that dredging for scallops—one of the most sought-after products of inshore fisheries; more than £30 million-worth are landed by Scottish vessels every year—can and often does have a detrimental impact on the sea bed. As Claudia Beamish pointed out, it is not a particularly environmentally friendly form of fishing. Several members have highlighted the role that technology has to play in addressing the problem.

In seeking to produce a more environmentally acceptable design of dredge, a constituent of mine has invested more than £100,000 in developing what he calls the N-Virodredge. It is an extremely impressive piece of kit. By using spring-loaded tines instead of fixed tines, and by ensuring that the steel net of the dredge rolls along the sea bed rather than being dragged along it, the N-Virodredge hugely reduces environmental damage. Furthermore, it reduces the fuel costs to skippers by between 25 per cent and 30 per cent

and causes considerably less damage to the scallops, thereby giving an improved meat yield. It is the most perfect example of a win-win development that I have come across for a long time.

Throughout its development, my constituent has sought assistance from Scottish Enterprise and Marine Scotland. That brings me to the essence of my intervention on Government support for technological innovation during the cabinet secretary's opening speech. Scottish Enterprise has been verbally very helpful but financially almost impotent. Marine Scotland, other than providing minimal assistance to a very early trial of the N-Virodredge, might as well not have existed with regard to the support that it has provided for development of what is an exciting piece of Scottish marine technology that could have a major international impact. As I had confirmed this morning, my constituent's efforts to correspond with Marine Scotland on the next phase of development have not even been acknowledged.

I contrast that with the actions of OPBN, the French fishing co-operative from Normandy, which will no doubt be music to Christian Allard's ears. About two years ago, when the co-operative heard about the N-Virodredge, it contacted Caen university, which in turn contacted the French Government. They have jointly run trials over the past two years. I understand that those trials are being taken to a second phase due to the immensely successful outcome of the first phase.

We have a uniquely Scottish product in development that would have a major positive impact on our inshore fisheries with regard to the environment, quality of catch and carbon footprint, but on which Scottish Government agencies have, at best, offered only verbal support. Essentially, they have turned their backs on all other aspects of the technology. That is not good enough from a Government that insists that it has at heart the best interests of all things Scottish. I ask the cabinet secretary to meet me to discuss how further development of this fantastic Scottish technology can be properly supported by Scottish resources.

I cannot speak on this subject without mentioning the immense shellfish potential of the Solway Firth, which Elaine Murray spoke about. In recent years, that potential has been decimated by illegal cockle harvesting and, in recent months, by the illegal electro-fishing of razor clams. I am reliably told that up to 42 boats have been reported in Luce bay engaged in that illegal activity in a single day. That is not a little local poaching; that is big business.

I welcome the Scottish Government's developments on cockle fishing, in which I have been involved heavily. However, I seek the

Government's assurance that it will address the razor clam issue every bit as seriously and urgently. As I said, the shellfish fishery potential of the Solway is immense, but it is virtually untapped. It badly needs Government support in order to develop.

The cabinet secretary and many others have mentioned the establishment of MPAs, the development of marine renewables and other initiatives that have been established in recent times. All those developments bring great challenges. Many questions require to be answered and we must provide those answers if we are to correct the imbalance that exists. The debate has been generally positive, which I welcome. We will support both the Labour amendment and the Government motion

16:37

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to close the debate for Labour. Scotland is a coastal nation. We have more than 6,000 miles of coastline, and the majority of MSPs represent coastal areas. I remember learning at school that Fife is a peninsula in the shape of a terrier's head that traces a coastline that is rich in history.

With more than 100 miles of coastline, Fife's history as a leisure, industrial, maritime, trading and fishing region has been shaped by its coastline. King James IV of Scotland described Fife as a

"a beggar's mantle fringed wi gould".

The gold fringe is the coast and its chain of little ports with their thriving fishing fleets and rich trading links.

With industrialisation, the focus of Fife's economy turned increasingly away from the coast and towards coal mining. However, the coast is again a vital part of the economy, and the expansion of leisure opportunities, offshore renewables and the developments at Rosyth port are all examples of how we see competing interests and opportunities along our coastline.

The motion talks about the cultural contribution. Fife is lucky to have the Scottish Fisheries Museum in Anstruther, and Roderick Campbell gave a fair analysis of the challenges that the inshore sector of the east neuk faces. Other more remote communities have inshore fisheries that play a much bigger part in their economies. Much of Scotland's inshore fleet of smaller boats exclusively employs local residents, which should build in a great incentive not to overexploit the resource. The income that they generate is retained locally to the benefit of many fragile rural communities. Those fisheries, particularly the

creeling and diving fisheries, can be entirely compatible with other income streams including marine tourism, which brings positive diversity to the area's economic opportunities.

Inshore fishing's importance to our coastal communities, particularly in the context of employment, is evident. I was pleased to hear members talk about successes in Eyemouth and Arbroath. Some of Scotland's most vulnerable towns and villages are on the coast; we must work together to deliver a strong and sustainable future for them. Inshore fishing and its benefits are vital for many areas. Members talked about the importance of the onshore sector—the processing sector—and the employment that it provides in many communities.

The inshore sector brings in upwards of £80 million to the Scottish economy—much of it in exports. How can we ensure that our coastal communities see more benefits from the revenue that has been generated on their doorstep?

Inshore fishing can be a volatile industry. Jayne Baxter talked about the challenges that face the industry in our region, in particular around the east neuk, and noted the fluctuation in the value of landings. The overall quayside value of sea fish and shellfish decreased by 8 per cent in 2013. Bertie Armstrong has talked about the difficulties that that has presented for the fishing sector. The Scottish Government has announced a hardship fund and a fund that aims to support the creel industry, which I very much welcome.

As the cabinet secretary said, we need to consider how we provide a legacy for the sector and opportunities for young skippers who come into the sector. We should ensure that the industry can be sustainable, by implementing a strategy that looks to the industry's longer-term future, in not just financial but environmental terms. Elaine Murray's description of cockle fishing in the Solway Firth showed how challenging that can be. She talked about the difficulty of enforcement, which Scottish Environment LINK mentioned in its briefing for this debate. How can licensing and service restrictions be enforced?

We need a long-term vision and plan. Our inshore marine environment is complex and remains poorly understood. The notes from the 2013 conference demonstrate that data collection is a big issue. How can we ensure that we have robust data and scientific evidence on which to base our decisions?

In the short term, what we must deliver is clear; we need a marine plan and an ecologically coherent network of well-managed marine protected areas by 2016. We then need responsive, collaborative management, which balances the needs of different sectors. Progress

in that regard will help to address tensions. I remember the members' business debate on the proposed special area of conservation designation for the Sound of Barra, which took place when the minister was fairly new in his post. In that case, the community was fearful of the risk to their fishing opportunities that the designation might present.

There is also increasing interest from the offshore sector in using our harbours. We need to ensure that we have a robust management system that facilitates constructive work with all interests.

Rhoda Grant talked about the need for strengthened local management in the interests of conservation. We should ensure that inshore fisheries groups that represent the fishing communities are empowered and given the tools that they need if they are to manage and conserve fishing for the good of their local economies.

Scotland takes the lead on many environmental issues. We fish in challenging mixed fisheries, and we have taken measures to improve the health of our seas and to deliver a more sustainable fishery. It can be argued that we have taken the lead in Europe on such issues.

However, Scottish Environment LINK expressed concern about unsustainable practices in inshore fishing, such as non-target bycatch, sea-bed habitat damage and overfishing. LINK acknowledged the measures that fishermen have taken to start to address such issues, but expressed concern about the IFGs' high-level management plans, which it says

"focus largely on conserving the stock levels of target species",

rather than on meeting a more high-level environmental objective. LINK says that the plans

"therefore fail to address wider ecosystem concerns."

We must strike the right balance between profitability and sustainability. Long-term profits might look inviting to many fishermen, some of whom struggle from season to season, and to coastal communities, but long-term sustainability and, especially, healthy fishing stocks can provide for sustained revenues that would ensure that in the future communities not just survive but thrive.

Scotland has an excellent international reputation for our seafood, which is exported all over the world. Last week, I visited Macrae Edinburgh Ltd in Livingston, which produces fish and seafood exclusively for the domestic market, with a focus on smoked salmon. In Scotland, we produce high-quality sustainable and traceable produce with a focus on consumer confidence. However, in that meeting, I was struck by the focus on occasion or party food; seafood and shellfish are not an everyday meal for us, which is

very different from how people eat on the continent. We need to do all that we can to promote seafood.

Last year, I took part in Sainsbury's switch the fish campaign, which encouraged people to eat Scottish mussels rather than prawns, and I follow @fishisthedish Twitter recipes, which encourage consumption and try to change consumer behaviour. We need more marketing initiatives. I welcome the cabinet secretary's confirmation of the increased support for Seafood Scotland.

So, opportunity exists; we can see the demand from around the world for Scottish produce. It is only right that we take advantage of that, but we need to ensure that we sustain a domestic market. We are increasingly seeing imported tropical prawns and Canadian lobsters. We have quality produce here, and we need to do more to promote locally sourced seafood. Rob Gibson made good points on that subject.

I could see no report yet from this year's seafood conference, but from last year's report it appears that there was a big debate about certification. Certification was recognised as an indication of good management and sustainability, but it was not considered to have shown increased financial returns for fishermen and was viewed as being costly and overonerous. Can the cabinet secretary give an update on discussions with the Marine Stewardship Council on that issue?

In its briefing for the debate, SIFT raised important concerns about the contrast between Scotland and England. In October, it said:

"There is little doubt that the management and compliance monitoring of Scotland's inshore waters is being starved of resources and falls far behind the situation in England. In essence Scotland is trying to manage inshore fisheries that cover almost twice the length of England's coast with less than 25% of the budget."

England, of course, does not have the same deep-sea fishing sector that Scotland has, and its focus may lie elsewhere. We can also perhaps see that it has a different emphasis in the UK fisheries minister's decision to redistribute some fishing quota away from the major operators in favour of the smaller-scale fishermen. SIFT described that move as signifying

"a shift towards recognising the importance of the small boat inshore fleet"

and confirming

"that the fishery is a public resource that should be managed for the benefit of the many, rather than"

the few.

There is a legitimate call to have that principle demonstrated more clearly in Scotland in the management of inshore waters. We need to be clearer about how we will demonstrate that.

I support Alison Johnstone's comments about the strategy; I, too, had difficulty in finding a strategy beyond the press release, which gave high-level objectives. There needs to be more detail for Parliament.

The debate has been interesting, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will respond to the comments that have been made by many members.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Richard Lochhead to wind up the debate. Cabinet secretary, you have until just before 5 o'clock.

16:47

Richard Lochhead: I am happy to take interventions on the basis that I have until 5 o'clock.

The debate has been good, and there has been much consensus across the chamber on the vast majority of issues. Devoting over two and a half hours to inshore fisheries in Scotland has been a good use of parliamentary time.

We have had some revelations. We heard that Liam McArthur used to want to be an inshore fisherman. We should advise him that it is not too late to change his career, if he still wants to consider that. We always hope to attract new entrants.

Liam McArthur *rose*—

Richard Lochhead: I will take an intervention already.

Liam McArthur: For the record and the avoidance of any doubt, I should declare that on my first trip out with my father in his boat I had to be strapped to the winch to prevent my throwing myself overboard, such was the nausea that I suffered. Therefore, I have not sought to follow in my father's footsteps.

Richard Lochhead: I repeat: we always hope to attract new entrants into the inshore fisheries sector in Scotland. Liam McArthur would be most welcome.

We also learned, of course, where in Scotland Stewart Stevenson ate his first scallop and various other fisheries products.

We had perhaps more negative contributions, such as that from Rhoda Grant, who seemed to attack SNP back benchers for raising the referendum issue following the raising of that subject by the front bench spokespeople of both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. I may tempt myself to return to that matter later on in my closing remarks.

It is good that we are debating our inshore sector, as it lands just under a fifth of the fish that

are landed in Scotland in terms of value. Our inshore fishermen therefore play a significant role in Scotland's successful and sustainable seafood story. Around 1,500 of the more than 2,000 vessels that operate in Scotland operate in the inshore sector. That is a substantial number of the fishing vessels in this country.

The inshore fishery is not just about the technical detail that we have discussed today. As Dave Thompson and others reminded us, we are talking about a sector and a way of life that have helped to determine the identity and culture of not just Scotland's coastal communities but the whole of Scotland.

As members have mentioned, we also use these opportunities—as we should do again today—to pay tribute to those fishermen who, over the years, have paid the ultimate price to bring fish to our tables. A number of members mentioned safety and we must always have safety issues at the forefront of our minds, not only in the promotion of safety at sea among our fishermen, which continues to be a big debate in the fishing industry, but in the context of how other industries operate in our waters. Several members mentioned the laying of cables for telecommunications purposes. We also have rigs and the offshore sector, as well as other sectors operating in our waters. There are a number of voluntary agreements covering our inshore waters to ensure that other industries operate safely in relation to inshore fishing vessels.

On the topic of bringing food to our tables, I welcome the Labour Party's amendment, which the Government will support. It talks about local food chains and the contribution of our seafood to the wider debate about food in Scotland. This time next week, I shall just be arriving in Brussels to take part in the seafood expo, which is the annual international event in Brussels to celebrate the European seafood sector. Scotland's stand must be seen to be believed. All members would be very proud to see Scotland's stand at that exhibition, where much good trade is carried out and the top-quality seafood that this country produces can compete with the best in the world.

Claudia Beamish: Does the Scottish Government have plans that can be worked on across the parties and with stakeholders to raise awareness in schools of the different types of fish that are caught by Scottish fishermen? The issue was highlighted by Dennis Robertson and is mentioned in our amendment.

Richard Lochhead: That is a good point, which I am about to come to. It will become even more pertinent once the discard ban has been introduced in Scotland and there is an obligation to land all the species that are caught in Scottish waters. We may have a challenge in developing

new markets and infrastructure for dealing with a variety of species that are not our staple species at the moment.

Scotland's seafood sector will be celebrated not just at the big expo in Brussels next week, which I will attend to support the industry and to host events on behalf of our country. On Friday, I will go to Whitehills in Banffshire to open the new dining room extension at the Seafield Arms. The establishment is owned by a local fishing family, so I have no doubt that it will be another example of a restaurant in Scotland that serves good local seafood produce.

Claudia Beamish and Dennis Robertson mentioned the promotion of seafood in our schools. We are supporting Seafood Scotland to deliver a seafood in schools project in Scotland's schools. Earlier today, I saw a tweet that said that seafood in schools will visit Elgin academy, in my constituency; it is a pity that I cannot be there. That is an active programme to introduce future generations to the healthiness of Scotland's seafood and the importance of the sector to Scotland.

Dennis Robertson: Does the cabinet secretary know how many opportunities there are for young apprentices in the industry, whether in the fishing boats, in the processing sector or in the restaurant sector?

Richard Lochhead: Apprenticeships are being developed in the food sector generally in Scotland and there is also a programme under way in the catching sector. That is one way in which we can attract new entrants and I would be happy to send Dennis Robertson some details on that.

Our fish processors also play a vital role. When we talk about the inshore fisheries sector, we must also talk about the onshore contribution. Many of our processors rely on the catch from inshore waters. Members have mentioned our processors in Eyemouth, Orkney and Shetland, but there are many others around Scotland's coasts that employ local people to process the catch from our inshore waters.

That is why the Scottish Government has given a further £100,000 to Seafood Scotland for marketing initiatives—many members asked about that—particularly to support the marketing of inshore creel-caught produce. That funding is part of the £700,000 that the seafood partnership has been provided with to put into practice its strategy for promoting new markets and developing seafood generally in Scotland, given that we want a reputation for having sustainable and top-quality Scottish seafood not just in our marketplace here in Scotland but throughout the world.

Today's debate is a good illustration that the inshore sector is a big priority for the Parliament,

but a lot of effort has gone into giving the inshore sector a much bigger voice.

Jamie McGrigor: Does the cabinet secretary agree that from a tourism point of view it is very important that shellfish should be seen to be available to be consumed locally in the Highlands, and especially in the west coast of Scotland, rather than push too much to have it all exported?

Richard Lochhead: I certainly agree with that, which is why I was delighted that the Highlands and Islands food awards last year presented the Ninth Wave restaurant on Mull with an award. The Lamonts catch local seafood and then serve it there: Mrs Lamont is the chef and Mr Lamont is the fisherman who catches the produce that is freshly served to people visiting Mull. That is the kind of food tourism that we certainly want to support.

Christian Allard: To follow up on what Jamie McGrigor said, it is very important that the tourists who come to this country can recognise that what they are buying is Scottish fish. How are we getting on with ensuring that we can label all our fish as Scottish?

Richard Lochhead: That is another important issue. Of course, if we had our own voice in Europe, we would have a direct say in fish labelling. In the meantime, however, we are promoting the taste our best certification for restaurants and hotels in Scotland that source and serve local produce and explain to the customer where the produce is from. Of course, seafood is a central part of that.

It is very important that we listen to the voice of the inshore sector, as we have been doing today. I held quayside conversations across Scotland last year and met many fishermen. As I said, I met over 70 fishermen last Friday in Peterhead as part of our regional fisheries assemblies and I held impromptu question-and-answer sessions at the Aberdeen fishing expo last year for 40 or 50 fishermen. That was not one of the easiest experiences that I have had in this job, but I do such things because I engage directly with our fishing industry. I do not recall any minister doing that kind of thing in the eight years when the Labour-Lib Dem coalition Government was in office, so I think that it is a bit rich for members on the Labour benches to criticise us for not engaging with our fishing sector.

Alex Fergusson: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Richard Lochhead: I think that I am out of time. My 15 minutes has disappeared and I am down to four minutes. I apologise to Alex Fergusson.

To further promote listening to the fishermen's voice we are promoting the concept of co-

management and have set up the inshore fisheries management conservation group to be taken forward with co-management. There was mention in the debate of the Government's strategy for inshore fishing and the fact that it has only high-level objectives. It is correct that we have published only high-level objectives as part of our strategy. We have done so because we want the detail to be populated by the bottom-up approach of our inshore fisheries groups at the grassroots level. We think that that is really important. Many members have called for that approach, which is exactly what we are supporting.

Of course, there are tools in the box for the inshore fisheries groups to use. For example, there are the regulating orders that Rhoda Grant, Liam McArthur and Rob Gibson mentioned. The orders are available as management tools that are at the disposal of the fisheries managers. Of course, inshore fisheries groups can make suggestions to bring forward regulating orders if they want. We have seen very successful examples of their being used in Shetland, where the local management group has an advantage over groups in the rest of Scotland and is way ahead of the game, having collected 10 years' worth of data, which is very valuable for taking management decisions in the times ahead.

Liam McArthur: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lochhead: I apologise for not doing so, but I have taken a number of interventions and I have to proceed with my final comments.

We also held two national conferences for the inshore fisheries sector in Scotland that were very well attended. Environmental interests were present, as well as the fishermen, scientists and public agencies. That kind of working together is certainly the way forward. Again, that illustrates the new focus on the future of our inshore fisheries sector in Scotland.

This is not just about talk at conferences or in inshore fisheries groups, though, because we are taking action. I mentioned that we have given an extra 1,000 tonnes of mackerel quota to the inshore sector, which is a substantial increase that will help to attract new entrants into the sector. We have also set up task forces to sort the gear-conflict issue and unlicensed fishing activity.

We have other initiatives, such as Clyde 2020, which a number of members mentioned. It is important to say that the Clyde is not a desert—there are fish stocks in the Clyde. We welcome the fact that it is not a desert, but we all recognise that it must be regenerated and that it must recover. The initiative is in place to try to achieve that by 2020 and it is widely supported among not only

communities on the Clyde but members across the chamber.

A number of members mentioned the scallop industry.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I ask you to wind up, cabinet secretary.

Richard Lochhead: We have had a review and we will announce the results shortly.

Finally, finally, finally, a number of people mentioned the independence referendum. How could I close without mentioning it? For Jamie McGrigor—a Conservative MSP—to stand up in the chamber and ask an SNP Government whether we would ever trade away Scotland's historical fishing opportunity takes the biscuit.

Jamie McGrigor *rose*—

The Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the cabinet secretary's time is up.

Richard Lochhead: I say to Jamie McGrigor in closing that the Government—

The Presiding Officer: Your time is up. That concludes the debate on inshore fisheries. *[Interruption.]* I ask the cabinet secretary to sit down, please.

Deregulation Bill

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-09538, in the name of John Swinney, on the Deregulation Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Deregulation Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 23 January 2014, relating to the amendment of the Farriers Registration Act 1975, and repeal of the Farm and Garden Chemicals Act 1967 and the Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking) Acts 1928 and 1931, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*John Swinney.*]

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

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-09836.1, in the name of Claudia Beamish, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09836, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on inshore fisheries, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09836, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on inshore fisheries, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the importance of Scotland's inshore fisheries as reflected in the inshore fisheries strategy; notes that the strategy has three main components, improving the evidence base for managing inshore fisheries, improving engagement with inshore fishermen and strengthening management through the network of inshore fisheries groups; commends the important economic and cultural contribution made to Scotland by some 1,500 inshore fishing vessels and associated onshore seafood businesses; supports the further development of inshore fisheries as a profitable, sustainable and vibrant sector, which exports top-quality, high-value products all over the world; recognises the role played by the industry in promoting seafood supply chains locally and the importance of raising public awareness of the benefits of domestic consumption, as well as recognising the importance of the export market; recognises the vital role played by inshore fisheries in supporting local economies, and understands the necessity of engaging with all marine stakeholders, including conservation and community groups, to ensure the protection and enhancement of Scotland's inshore waters in the present as well as for future generations.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09538, in the name of John Swinney, on the Deregulation Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Deregulation Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 23 January 2014, relating to the amendment of the Farriers Registration Act 1975, and repeal of the Farm and Garden Chemicals Act 1967 and the Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking) Acts 1928 and 1931, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Action on Hearing Loss (Hear to Help Service)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

We move swiftly on, and the final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-09310, in the name of Fiona McLeod, on Action on Hearing Loss and the benefits of its hear to help service. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament commends the Action on Hearing Loss hearing aid support service, Hear to Help; considers that, by offering free maintenance, information and support for NHS hearing aid wearers, it provides an invaluable service; understands that the advantages for users include increased use of and benefit and satisfaction from their hearing aids, easier and speedier access to support and services in the area where they live, improved confidence and communication skills and reduced feelings of isolation, and congratulates Action on Hearing Loss on its community-based service in Strathkelvin and Bearsden and across the country, which, with the support of what it sees as its hard-working volunteers, works closely with audiology services across communities to provide a mix of outreach, domiciliary and drop-in services.

17:03

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank the members across the parties who signed my motion so that we could hold the debate. I also thank the members who will speak and who have stayed to listen to the opening speeches. I thank the minister for meeting volunteers from Action on Hearing Loss earlier this afternoon. I welcome to the public gallery many volunteers and their supporters—supporters who are human and canine.

I welcome Delia Henry, who is the director of Action on Hearing Loss Scotland, and her staff. I thank her and her staff for the effort that they put into producing the briefing for the debate, which was incredibly helpful for a lot of members. I think that I am right in saying that Paul Breckell, Action on Hearing Loss's chief executive, is up from London. I welcome him and thank him for joining us. He did not need his passport to come here, and he still will not need it after September.

I first met volunteers for Action on Hearing Loss and its hear to help service at the Kilsyth Road sheltered housing complex in my constituency. On that day, Action on Hearing Loss was celebrating a birthday. The volunteers were there not only to help the people who live in the complex with their hearing aids but to celebrate, so we had birthday cake. That was a nice introduction to a very good group of volunteers; it was also the first time that I met Irene and Muffin, her hearing dog, who inspired me to do as much as I can to help the charity.

Along the way, I have hosted two Scottish National Party fringe meetings for the charity and attended its drop-in sessions at Kirkintilloch and Bishopbriggs libraries in my constituency. Indeed, I went to the Bishopbriggs library drop-in just before Christmas; there was no birthday cake this time, but there were sweets and Santa hats. The group of volunteers really know what they are doing, and they also know how to welcome people along to their drop-in services. It would be remiss of me not to say that, in 2012, our Irene and Muffin were awarded the national health service volunteer of the year award in Scotland for all the work that they do. In the past 10 months, 145 people attended the drop-in sessions in my constituency, but we do not have just those sessions, as work is also done in the Campsie view care home and in two sheltered housing complexes.

This is such important work for a lot of reasons. Having local drop-in sessions for people who need to have their hearing aid retubed or batteries put in makes it so much easier for them to get along and make sure that everything is working okay. Having volunteers doing the work helps, too, because many of them are also hearing aid users, so they bring the personal touch. They are trained to do their job well, but they also bring the hints and tips that they know and give them to the people who attend the drop-in sessions.

Increasingly, the volunteers also work with other services. For example, just last week, Esther Rantzen from the Silver Line was in the Parliament, and she talked about the work that that organisation is doing with Action on Hearing Loss.

The biggest and most important thing is that, if someone's hearing aid fits properly and performs to its maximum, they will use it. They will not be like my father-in-law, who kept his hearing aid in a drawer "to keep it good". That does not work.

The issue is also important because deafness is a disability that is associated with ageing, and all of us in the Parliament know that we are looking at an ageing population, so we will have more and more people with a hearing loss, which can be incredibly socially isolating. We have to work on that. I know from my family's personal experience that hearing loss can be masked by other problems. If someone has dementia, it is not always easy to know that they have a hearing loss. Local drop-in sessions with people who are trusted are incredibly important.

This work is about the voluntary sector working in partnership with the national health service—something that all of us in the Parliament support. It also helps to meet elements of the Scottish Government's see hear strategy, which was launched, I think, just last week. I will give some

statistics on the work that the hear to help service has done over the past few years. There have been 13,868 interventions to support hearing aid wearers, and drop-in sessions in 52 community venues. Hear to help volunteers have contributed 16,000 hours, which equates to £122,400-worth of work. There are four projects across Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Tayside, Borders and Ayrshire and Arran.

Those statistics show that this is a valuable service, that it is used well and that it also saves the national health service money, so I conclude by asking why, for yet another year, some health boards are having to be chased for the funding for this incredibly useful service. My plea to the health boards would be that they know that the service makes sense financially, clinically and socially for hearing aid wearers, so they should please just sort the funding. Beyond that, I would say to the four health boards that are involved and are experiencing the benefits they should not just sort the funding but go out and spread the word to other health boards around the country.

I again thank members for being here and contributing to the debate and, most important, I thank the volunteers for the amazing work that they do across our communities. I finish with an invitation to the reception that I will hold for Action on Hearing Loss in Parliament on the evening of Tuesday 20 May in committee room 2. Everyone is welcome to come along and hear the volunteers' personal experiences.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for the commercial.

17:10

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Fiona McLeod on securing the debate.

The 2011 Scottish census asked for the very first time whether respondents had partial hearing loss or deafness. The census data established that, at that time, just under 351,000 people, or 7 per cent of the population, had partial hearing loss or deafness. The data also showed that 5,194 people from my constituency said that they suffered from partial hearing loss or deafness. At the time, that was one in 10 of my electorate, which is a substantial number of people, and the figure is growing because, as we get older, we tend to lose some of our hearing faculties.

I commend Action on Hearing Loss and its hear to help project, particularly because it started in the Scottish Borders in 2007. It is very important that such projects are accessible in particularly rural areas, where travelling distances can be such a difficulty for people. Since then, hear to

help has done 14 quarterly care home visits and, since 2009, it has run 305 drop-in sessions, retubed 3,500 hearing aids and distributed approximately 9,200 packets of hearing aid batteries. That is all very practical stuff and, as Fiona McLeod said, it is volunteers who deliver the service—18 active volunteers deliver 5,500 hours of volunteering time. All that volunteering is free, and it is often given by people who suffer themselves from hearing impairment, so they know what they are talking about and therefore people pay attention to them. They know about people concealing their hearing loss or feeling isolated or ashamed that their hearing is becoming impaired, so they are able to break down barriers. Through the delivery of the service, they are also saving the national health service—in the case of my constituency, NHS Borders—a great deal of money and resources. I congratulate those volunteers on what they are doing.

I move on to a new initiative—actually, it is not a new initiative; there cannot be such a thing as a new initiative or an old initiative, as that is a tautology—called BLISS. The Borders local integrated sensory service is quite a mouthful, and I am glad that it calls itself BLISS. With BLISS, Action on Hearing Loss has combined with the Royal National Institute of Blind People to deliver services on the main street. It is important that the service is not hidden away but is at 46 High Street, Galashiels, just down the road from my office. I am delighted to say that I, other MSPs and MPs attended the opening of the office. It is a nice, shiny, attractive office that holds practical information telling people about the various places where they can go to get help. It also has little rooms where people can have private meetings. That is probably one of the ways forward that we can take in this time of funding difficulties.

Fiona McLeod was quite right to raise the issue of funding, because we know that hear to help is short of funding and will lose funding in June. I know that BLISS, too, has challenges with its funding. Perhaps volunteering is the way forward in some areas. Volunteers for BLISS have given up 10,000 hours to support people. BLISS has 60 volunteers, combining those from the RNIB and those from hear to help. Some people suffer from hearing loss and sight problems as they get older, and the project is very much to be commended.

I commend the volunteers, who are unsung heroes. Sybil King, Jean Gibson and Eileen Frame are all from the Borders; Rob Marr is not a borderer but comes from East Lothian—somebody has to come from East Lothian. Rob volunteers in West Linton, Peebles and Innerleithen. Those people are the salt of the earth. Unlike those of us who are paid and get recognition, they do what they do quietly and deliver something practical and useful to people who need it and are thankful for it.

I congratulate Fiona McLeod on securing the debate. It is time that we recognised the effort that has been put in by the volunteers, and I would like the minister to give the projects some money.

17:15

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I congratulate Fiona McLeod on bringing the debate to the chamber, and I pay tribute to the work of Action on Hearing Loss and the hear to help support service. It is evident from what we have heard about the service in the speeches so far that it is a lifeline for many people in our communities who use hearing aids. I very much hope that the funding that Christine Grahame asked for will allow that very useful project to be rolled out so that people—especially those in constituencies and regions such as mine who cannot access audiology services easily—can benefit from it.

It is hard to imagine how isolating hearing loss can be. People no longer have the ability to enter into conversation, and all the interactions that we take for granted, which involve hearing and listening to what people are saying and making our own contributions, are lost. In addition, many of those people are elderly and may be at a difficult time in their life—perhaps they have lost a partner or they are losing their mobility and independence—and the frustration of not being able to express themselves and hear reactions must be very difficult for them.

Fiona McLeod mentioned the cross-party group discussions last week on the Silver Line telephone helpline. If someone suffers from hearing loss, the simple services that are out there are no longer available to them because they cannot access them easily. In addition, it is very difficult to access information, so we need to take seriously the impact of hearing loss on a person's life.

I have a friend who lost her sight in adulthood. She often said that as a plus point—if there is a plus point to losing your sight—she was glad that it was her sight that she had lost rather than her hearing, because at least she could still interact with friends. That underlines how difficult it must be for someone to lose their hearing.

Early intervention is important. We need to identify those who may suffer from hearing loss and give them access to services in a timely manner. When my father began to lose his hearing, we went to clinics begging for a hearing aid, but no one would give him one because they said that he was not ready for an aid yet. That went on and on, and he eventually got a hearing aid. However, hours after it had been fitted, we discovered that it was in his pocket. He said that he was better off with everything quiet, because it had been quiet for so long that he was no longer

able to use the hearing aid and get the full benefit from it. That was quite sad, and I think that, if he had had the aid some years before, it would have made a big difference to his life. We need to look at screening and ensure that people have early access to services.

We also need to consider—this is part of the hear to help project—how we cater for the elderly population who cannot access audiology services easily because they cannot travel into towns and perhaps live a long way away. They may need help with maintenance such as battery care, because they may not be able to take the new technology on board very easily. That is where the hear to help project comes into its own, as it helps those people to get the maximum benefit from their hearing aid when they get it.

We have to look at other aspects. If we are able to identify people early on, we can ensure that they are taught British Sign Language, for example, so that it becomes natural to them. Once their hearing loss becomes apparent, they can pick up and hone those skills more easily if they have already learned them. That applies to lip reading too, which would allow people to communicate more easily.

We need to look after our hearing, because it is very precious. I hope that the minister will look at ways of rolling out the hear to help service in other parts of Scotland.

17:19

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Fiona McLeod on bringing this important debate to the chamber—it is good that we do this kind of thing. Fiona adequately summed up what the hear to help service is about. It is just one of the services that are provided by Action on Hearing Loss, which I support.

I emphasise that it is important that we get as early an analysis of people's problems as possible. Fiona McLeod said that we are looking at an ageing population—well, I look at an ageing population every time I look in the mirror, and I was thinking of hanging around and keeping it that way. However, what I know about my family history tells me that, if I stick around, not only will I be a bigger pain but I probably will not hear as well.

As I have told members before, because I damaged my ear, I am one of those people who got a hearing aid relatively early in life, which gives me some advantages on occasion. Part of the problem is that, as Rhoda Grant pointed out, when people do not get diagnosed early enough, they get so used to their impaired hearing that they struggle to work with a hearing aid when they get one. That issue was the subject of an extremely

interesting discussion at our most recent party conference, where I convened a meeting for a change. We are beginning to understand that early diagnosis is important. It is about spending to save, although I say that knowing fine well that the minister and the Scottish Government understand it and that I am preaching to the converted.

I commend the volunteers who work in the hear to help service. They come to my constituency, with sessions in Brechin library, the Links health centre in Montrose and Whitehills health centre in Forfar. However, I share the concerns that the service needs to be properly funded. We are not sure whether Angus Council is going to fund it, but I encourage it to do so. Looking further north in my constituency, it appears that Aberdeenshire Council is not signed up to the service, so I find myself saying, "Dear Aberdeenshire Council, why not?" I suspect that it really should do that.

I want to consider why people do not go for early diagnosis. A couple of things apply, simply because we are human beings. I am sure that, when we lose our faculties, we tend to compensate and I suspect that we learn to lip read. We just do not want to believe that we are losing our hearing or possibly our sight or some of our other faculties. There is a lack of awareness of the decay of our abilities. However, I am sure that a fraction of the population know perfectly well that they cannot hear or see as well as they could but just believe that nobody cares or will do anything about it, or that anything much can be done. Part of what we have to do is to encourage those who are aware of their problem to find ways of getting it diagnosed and getting help.

That was one of the themes of the aforementioned meeting—that we probably need to do as much as we can in the high streets to enable people to go into the chemist and get a hearing test. That would allow them simply to find out how good or bad their hearing is. People can then, without too much effort, understand that they have a problem and be signposted in the right direction.

Fiona McLeod was good enough to invite us to a reception, which I wrote down as being on Tuesday 28 May—is that right?

Fiona McLeod: It is 20 May.

Nigel Don: It is important that we get that right. I will give members another date by inviting anyone who has an interest in the issue to come to the Webster theatre in Arbroath on Sunday 8 June. I say that partly because that will be the first and only scheduled performance of a musical that I have written about Mr Burns, but much more importantly in the context—this is not irrelevant—I will take the opportunity to raise some money for Action on Hearing Loss, because I genuinely want

to support the charity, which works in my area. We are all getting older and our faculties will not get any better—this is irreversible, guys. Therefore, any money that is put into that worthy charity has to be a good thing.

17:23

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I thank members for the tourist information bulletins that have peppered the debate, and I thank Fiona McLeod for having secured it. I unreservedly congratulate the Scottish Government on the action plan that it has launched and the funding that it has put towards it. This is another of those issues on which the Parliament has demonstrated that it has the luxury of time to pause so that we can reflect on, debate and produce strategies on issues that otherwise tend to be marginalised and overlooked. The Government's action plan is to be commended.

I particularly acknowledge the work of Delia Henry and her team at Action on Hearing Loss. I pay tribute to Donaldson's school for the deaf, which has interacted with members of the Parliament to great effect on a number of occasions—I will say a little more about that in a minute.

I want to do all that I can to support and encourage people to take advantage of the hear to help service. I visited one of the local operations in the west of Scotland in the village of Neilston. It is important to emphasise that it is not some great big, grand enterprise but a highly practical operation with volunteers who are there to assist. When I went along, I was invited to see whether there was anything that I could do, if I wished. I have to say that I am so ham-fisted on such occasions that I decided that it would probably not be to the advantage of anybody's hearing aid to let me loose on it. However, it brought home to me how pernickety and fiddly the work is and, therefore, how vital it is that there is a service—in the case of the Neilston operation, supported by many volunteers—that allows the important cleaning and renewal of the batteries to be undertaken effectively.

If somebody is ham-fisted as I am, the easiest thing for them to do is to damage the hearing aid irreparably or, if they do not have confidence, not to have it properly serviced with the result that it is rendered ineffective. The voluntary groups that operate in all the locations that have been mentioned throughout Scotland provide a vital service and we need to do everything that we can to promote it to ensure that people appreciate that there is probably access to such a service near to them.

I will also say something about the on the move project, which is another of the projects that Action on Hearing Loss promotes. It relates to information and access for 16 to 25-year-olds.

When I visited Donaldson's school for the deaf, I was very struck by a sculpture in the entrance foyer. It had a profound impact on me. It is of a pair of hands and was made by a talented pupil who was a star of the school and was able to go to the University of Aberdeen in the expectation of fulfilling a meaningful career. However, that young person was crushed—his confidence was crushed—because of the lack of a continuing service for people of his age when he got there. Eventually, he completely lost confidence and withdrew.

Nothing could demonstrate more the need for us to ensure continuity of care so that young people moving into the world of work and employment who have such talent and wish to contribute do not find themselves wholly marginalised because of a lack of sensitivity and understanding among others who somehow misjudge their impairment as a lack of ability, intelligence or willingness to participate. It must be soul destroying not to be able to take advantage of that talent when it exists.

I agree with what Rhoda Grant said about British Sign Language. When people from Donaldson's school were in the Parliament, they taught members a little bit of signing. I have forgotten it all, but the point is that it was not difficult to pick up some basic signing. It would be useful for more people to be able to participate at that level.

The demographic challenge has been mentioned once again—yes, the ageing population. This is, after all, an ageing Parliament and many of us feel that ministers are serially deaf to all the pleas that we often make. However, in this instance, the Government has responded effectively.

Fiona McLeod's motion has given us a chance to articulate and give further support to an important matter. I congratulate her on that and I welcome the efforts that the Government is making.

17:28

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I add my thanks to my colleague Fiona McLeod for and I congratulate her on securing this debate on the really important, if sometimes overlooked, subject of hearing loss.

I also commend the work carried out by Action on Hearing Loss around Scotland. Like other members, I am grateful to Alan Dalziel, the communications and campaigns manager for

Action on Hearing Loss for drawing to our attention the range of support services that the organisation provides.

What struck me first is that it is the small interventions that make the most difference. Providing basic maintenance, such as replacing tubes and batteries—which Jackson Carlaw mentioned—and cleaning out ear moulds, means that people with a hearing impairment do not need to attend hospital for such services. There are a number of advantages to that: people do not need to make journeys to the audiology departments of hospitals and staff there can concentrate on the clinical side of the work.

It is possibly of even greater importance that people with hearing impairments can feel comfortable about dropping into the various hear to help locations to meet, discuss issues and get advice and guidance on a variety of subjects. That is all extremely valuable and makes an even bigger contribution to their sense of wellbeing. It helps to reduce the isolation that people with sensory impairments all too often feel.

I am delighted to learn that two hear to help services currently operate in Kilmarnock—one in the town centre and one in Onthank, where I grew up—and that another is planned for the town of Newmilns. I am also delighted to learn that two volunteers from my constituency—Katrina Hyslop and Wilma Anderson—are in the public gallery tonight, and I offer them a warm welcome.

I was taken aback when I read that, in Scotland, there are 850,000 people with some level of hearing loss. The impact that that has on people's lives often goes far beyond the disability itself. I will illustrate what I mean. Some time ago, I had the privilege of attending a question-and-answer session with members of the Ayrshire mission to the deaf. Their first message to me, through their interpreter, was to keep things as simple as possible, not to use complex words and concepts and, of course, to try to speak slowly for the benefit of those who were trying to lip read. It became obvious to me that people with hearing loss and hearing impairment can face an ever-widening circle of exclusion, because they cannot interpret language and its complexities as quickly as others can. For example, forms are more difficult, if not impossible, for them to understand. Queuing up in any kind of setting—for example, in job centres, council offices, shops or pubs—becomes incredibly stressful, because more time is needed to explain and to understand. People with hearing loss or impairment often give up on those types of interaction altogether.

The language in newspapers is often far too complex, and even our party political leaflets are almost unintelligible to people with hearing impairments—there is perhaps no surprise there.

The experience certainly made me think carefully about how we can communicate ideas as simply as possible.

All those issues lead to further isolation. That is why the work that is carried out by Action on Hearing Loss and the hear to help service is so important. Bringing people together helps them to overcome many of those problems and it certainly helps to hold back further exclusion, which will inevitably get worse if we lose such services.

I thank Fiona McLeod for bringing to the Parliament's attention the issues surrounding hearing loss, and I commend the work that is done by Action on Hearing Loss and the valuable contribution that it makes to enriching the lives of those with a hearing disability.

17:32

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Like others, I thank Fiona McLeod for bringing this debate to the Parliament and I congratulate her on securing time and support for her motion.

Just last Thursday, I had the pleasure of launching Scotland's national sensory impairment strategy, see hear, which Fiona McLeod mentioned in her speech. The strategy has been developed in close collaboration with partner organisations across the country—local authorities, health boards and small and large third sector organisations. I take this opportunity to place on record my thanks to Action on Hearing Loss for its invaluable and insightful contribution to the development of the national strategy and also for its commitment to take forward the most important element of the strategy, which is its implementation: taking the words from the page and turning them into real action on the ground.

The see hear strategy is the first sensory impairment strategy of its kind, not only here in Scotland but anywhere in the UK. It recognises the need to ensure that we give the right support and assistance to the approximately 850,000 people with hearing loss in Scotland, as well as to those who have a visual impairment or a deaf-blind impairment. It is there to help support those with a hearing loss or a visual impairment, whether mild or profound. Moreover, it considers also the risks of sensory loss and issues relating to those who may be living with a hidden or an untreated sensory loss, which is the very point that Nigel Don raised in his speech. Particularly vulnerable in that regard are older people in our care homes. It is important that we ensure that, given that they are vulnerable to having an untreated or hidden sensory loss, they get access to the right kind of services and assessment in order to address their sensory loss.

The key emphasis is on delivering positive, person-centred outcomes through partnership working that will improve outcomes at a local level and will allow the seamless provision of assessment, care and support to children and adults who are living with a sensory impairment.

Local partnership working will be crucial to that, with all partners—local authority, health board and the third sector—engaged in working together on a joint plan to take the partnership forward locally. Christine Grahame talked about the need for joint planning and joint working. If we get that right, we can deliver much more integrated, efficient and effective care and support to people who are living with sensory loss and impairment.

However, the delivery of significant and tangible improvements to the provision of care will count for absolutely nothing unless there is equity in how services affect people on the ground and unless there is improvement in the quality of life for individuals living with or experiencing a sensory loss.

Fiona McLeod referred to the fact that, earlier today, I had the pleasure of meeting a number of volunteers from throughout the country—Glasgow, Tayside, the Borders, and Ayrshire and Arran—who are involved in hear to help. And how could I not mention Muffin and Callie, their two canine helpers? The work of those volunteers in delivering the hear to help initiative clearly demonstrates the importance of effective, good, local partnership working and the impact that it can have on someone's day-to-day life.

Fiona McLeod was right to highlight that the hear to help initiative offers a variety of community-based provision, such as drop-in centres, outreach and home services. Volunteers work throughout their local NHS board area and, in doing so, help to relieve some of the pressure on our audiology services from repeated requests. In that sense, the service helps to maximise the potential gains for the local community through local volunteers, who can help to support and assist those with a hearing impairment.

Fiona McLeod and others were right to say that that initiative is proving invaluable in improving the quality of life of people throughout the country who use hearing aids. The see hear strategy aims to support that very approach and to develop and enhance the type of local service delivery that improves services across the board. It is important that we ensure that that translates into real, tangible improvement on the ground for service users.

Current local service delivery models operate at different levels throughout the country. I recognise that some health boards are more productive than others. I encourage them all to look at that

approach as a mechanism that can help to improve the delivery of audiology services in their area. A key part of the new strategy will be to look at the current provision—for example the work that is being taken forward by Action on Hearing Loss and other organisations—and take that into account and include it in any new care pathway that is developed as part of the new strategy. Borders local integrated sensory services in Galashiels, which I had the pleasure of opening back in 2011, is a good example of the type of service that the new strategy wants to build upon in order to develop further. The funding that is being delivered alongside the strategy is to help to increase that capacity further.

I want to mention the way in which Action on Hearing Loss has gone about helping to effect change in this area. I am more than happy to put on record my appreciation of the work that AHL does throughout the country, through initiatives such as hear to help. Moreover, its continuing contribution to the implementation of our new national sensory impairment strategy will be invaluable and very much appreciated. I am certain that, within the collaborative and innovative framework created by the see hear strategy, hear to help will continue to flourish in its delivery of benefits to local service users.

I finish by simply thanking Action on Hearing Loss and the hear to help volunteers for their dedication and work over the years. I wish them well in taking that forward in the weeks, months and years ahead.

Meeting closed at 17:40.

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